

**EXPLORING FACTORS THAT HELPED ADOLESCENTS ADJUST AND  
CONTINUE WITH LIFE AFTER THE DEATH OF A PARENT**

By

DANE LUDIK

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**Supervisor: Prof A.P. Greeff**

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Department of Psychology

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## **DECLARATION**

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## SUMMARY

Globally studies indicate that adolescents' exposure to parental death is on the increase, yet there are few South African studies on this topic. While limited studies have been done on grief and loss within South African populations, most of these studies were conducted on adult populations (Anderson & Phillips, 2006; Merlo & Lakey, 2007). It therefore is important to highlight factors that helped adolescents to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent.

Antonovsky's (1987) sense of coherence theory and Bowlby's (1980) lifespan attachment theory were used within the larger paradigm of positive psychology as the theoretical framework of this study, which aimed to identify factors that helped adolescents to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent. A qualitative research design was utilised, in which 12 participants participated in semi-structured interviews. To identify factors that helped these adolescents to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent, the qualitative data were analysed according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis.

The following themes and sub-themes, as identified from the qualitative data and the literature review, were identified as helpful for adjustment after parental death: *family support: supportive remaining parent, parent has a supportive partner (the partner supports the child, the long-term partner offers companionship to the remaining parent) and supportive extended family; social support: child has supportive friends (friends offer emotional support to child, friends distract child from circumstances) and supportive community; religion: religion as a coping mechanism and religion as means of communicating with the deceased parent; and strong sense of coherence as an intra-personal coping mechanism.* In addition, the following non-specific coping mechanisms that helped

with adjusting after the death of a parent were identified: *exercising, allowing time to prepare for the death of a parent diagnosed with cancer, tangible reminders of the deceased and journal writing.*

This study provides adolescents' perspectives on factors that helped them to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent. The study also contributes to South African research on adolescents' exposure to parental death. The results can be used to design interventions and organise support groups for adolescents whose parent have passed away. Support groups can be set up in which adolescents share their individual experiences of what helped them to adjust. As an exploratory study, this study makes recommendations for future, related studies on factors that help adolescents to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent.

## OPSOMMING

Alhoewel studies wêreldwyd daarop dui dat adolessente se blootstelling aan ouerverlies toeneem, is daar nog steeds min Suid-Afrikaanse navorsing oor hierdie onderwerp gedoen. Daar is 'n beperkte aantal Suid-Afrikaanse studies oor die rou-proses en die verlies van 'n ouerfiguur, maar die meerderheid navorsing wat gedoen is, fokus op volwassenes se ervaring van verlies (Anderson & Phillips, 2006; Merlo & Lakey, 2007). Dit is juis daarom belangrik om faktore uit te lig wat adolessente gehelp het om voort te gaan met hul lewe na die verlies van 'n ouer.

Antonovsky (1987) se aanpassingsteorie en Bowlby (1980) se lewensduur- gehegtheidsteorie is gebruik binne die groter paradigma van die positiewe sielkunde as die teoretiese raamwerk van hierdie studie. Die doel van die studie was om faktore te identifiseer wat adolessente gehelp het om aan te pas en voort te gaan met hulle lewens na die afsterwe van 'n ouer. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is gebruik, waar 12 deelnemers aan semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude deelgeneem het. Met behulp van Braun en Clarke (2006) se ses stappe van tematiese ontleding is faktore geïdentifiseer wat adolessente gehelp het met die aanpassing en verwerkingsproses ná die verlies van 'n ouer.

Die volgende temas en sub-temas, soos geïdentifiseer tydens die kwalitatiewe ontleding asook die literatuuroorsig, is aangedui as behulpzaam vir aanpassing na die dood van 'n ouer: *gesinsondersteuning: ondersteunende ouer, ouer het 'n ondersteunende lewensmaat (lewensmaat ondersteun kind, lewensmaat bied kameraadskap vir ouer)* en *ondersteunende uitgebreide familie; sosiale ondersteuning: kind het ondersteunende vriende (vriende bied emosionele ondersteuning, vriende bied afleiding van omstandighede)* en *ondersteunende gemeenskap; godsdiens: geloof as behartigingsmeganisme, godsdiens as manier om met die oorledene te kommunikeer; en laastens, 'n sterk sin van koherensie as 'n intra-persoonlike*

*behartigingsmeganisme. Die volgende nie-spesifieke behartigingsmeganismes is ook geïdentifiseer om behulpsaam te wees gedurende die aanpas en verwerkingsproses: fisiese oefening, tyd om voor te berei vir die dood van 'n ouer wat met kanker gediagnoseer is, tasbare herinneringe aan die oorlede ouer en 'n joernaal hou.*

Die studie bied dus faktore wat adolessente gehelp het met die aanpassing en verwerkingsproses ná die dood van 'n ouer. Die studie dra by tot Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur oor adolessente se blootstelling aan ouerverlies. Die resultate kan gebruik word om intervensies te ontwikkel en ondersteuningsgroepe te organiseer vir adolessente wie se ouer of ouers afgesterf het. Ondersteuningsgroepe kan opgestel word waarin adolessente hulle individuele ervarings deel oor aspekte wat hulle gehelp het om ná die verlies van 'n ouer aan te pas. As 'n verkennende studie word in hierdie studie aanbevelings gemaak vir toekomstige, verwante navorsing wat kan fokus op faktore wat adolessente gehelp het met die aanpassing en verwerkingproses ná die dood van 'n ouer.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction, Motivation for and Aims of the Study**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Worldwide, research indicates that adolescents' exposure to parental death is on the rise (Anderson & Phillips, 2006). In fact, in South Africa, adult death rates between the ages of 20 and 40 more than doubled from 1997 to 2006 (Anderson & Phillips, 2006). Yet, despite these statistics, there are few South African studies on this issue. While a few notable studies have been done on grief and loss in South African populations (e.g. Groenewald, Nannan, Bourne, Laubscher, & Bradshaw, 2005; Nojilana, Groenewald, Bradshaw & Reagon, 2009; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007), most of these were conducted on adult populations. An exploration of the literature on the topic of adolescent parental bereavement shows that the topic of adolescent grieving has received considerable attention internationally, especially within western populations in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) (Merlo & Lakey, 2007; Noppe & Noppe, 2004; Schlozman, 2003; Walker & Shaffer, 2007). This alone indicated a need for continued research on this understudied area in South Africa.

In a developing country such as South Africa, factors threatening the lives of people include violence, poverty and disease, which leaves adolescents and children vulnerable to parental loss (Anderson & Phillips, 2006; Merlo & Lakey, 2007;). The psychological experience of South African adolescents undergoing parental bereavement, and the possible effect that bereavement could have on their well-being, have not received enough attention from researchers. It therefore becomes incumbent on social scientists in South Africa to investigate the extent to which parental loss affects the surviving adolescent's psychological well-being.

Factors that have been associated with assisting parentally bereaved adolescents include a solid support system. More specifically, adolescents with secure supportive figures such as supportive family members and friends, and support from the community, appear to adjust more optimally compared to adolescents who lack a secure support structure (Balk & Corr, 2009; Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003). According to Ringler and Hayden (2000), adolescents particularly value social support such as peer support, since friends play a significant role during adolescence. Friendships therefore play a significant role during adolescent bereavement and the recovery process after parental loss (Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

The loss of a parent, irrespective of the cause of death, is a traumatic experience for any person (McClatchey & Wimmer, 2014). However, a number of authors declare that bereaved adolescents have a special vulnerability to loss due to major social and biological changes that take place in their transition from childhood to adulthood, during which they achieve emotional independence (Balk & Corr, 2009; Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003). In contrast, some authors regard adolescents to be resilient and likely to have a mature understanding of death (Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Yet the majority of findings indicate that adolescents who have lost a parent have difficulty coming to terms with the fact that the person has died. Bereaved adolescents also experience more emotional emptiness, have a larger desire to talk with someone about death, and have greater feelings of anger toward the deceased parent for deserting them (Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003).

Moreover, epidemiological evidence indicates a greater incidence of problems among adolescents who have experienced a significant loss (Balk & Corr, 2009; Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Long-term effects include the increased likelihood of medical illness, psychiatric illness and suicidal risk as adults (Balk & Corr, 2009; Ringler & Hayden, 2000; Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013). In order to prevent these negative outcomes, mitigating factors need to be

identified. According to Servaty-Seib and Haysip (2003) it is important to help adolescents cope with grief, such as through acquiring self-help skills and utilising social support (e.g. support from a parent, relatives and friends).

An understanding of the factors that have an effect on an adolescent's coping with bereavement is important for families, effective nursing practice, school health services and parents (Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003). Support systems and coping strategies for the adolescent are important in helping an adolescent to adapt and continue with life after losing a parent. Adolescents most often prefer sustained emotional support that comprises talking, listening and feeling understood. In addition, 40% of adolescents want on-going structural support (Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

Although the bereavement process of adolescents has been noted in various studies, only a few empirical studies have considered the role of helpful resources in assisting adolescent recovery after the death of a parent (Anderson & Phillips, 2006; Sugarman, 2014). Consequently, the aim of this study was to gain an understanding of adolescents' resources that assist them to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent. This study implements and promotes a positive psychology viewpoint in studying these adolescents' experiences. The focus of this study is not on pathology following the adolescent's loss and bereavement, but rather on the adolescent's recovery process and adjustment after the death of his or her parent.

## **1.2 Motivation for and aims of the study**

According to Anderson and Phillips (2006), the number of South African adolescents who experience the death of a parent is increasing each year. This study can raise awareness of such adolescents, as well as promote ways of helping these adolescents. Moreover, it appears

that, despite the increase in parental deaths, ways of supporting bereaved adolescents seem to be absent from the South African literature (Anderson & Phillips, 2006).

Overall, the literature on death and dying has emphasised the pathological aspects of the experience of losing someone (Janosik & Green, 1992; Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003). Most studies researching parental deaths have focused on the bereavement process and do not provide adequate information about what helped adolescents so cope and adjust after the death of a parent (McClatchey & Wimmer, 2014). This study, however, is focused on exploring factors that helped adolescents adjust after losing a parent, within the paradigm of positive psychology.

The positive psychology paradigm uses scientific understanding and effective intervention to aid in the achievement of a satisfactory life, rather than treating mental illness. The focus of positive psychology is on personal growth rather than on pathology, as is common in other frameworks within the field of psychology (Linley, Josephs, Harrington, & Wood, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). By gaining a better understanding of the ways adolescents adjust and cope after losing a parent, health-care workers can implement the promotion of adaptive bereavement responses among the bereaved adolescent population (Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

### **1.3 Conclusion**

This study, within the paradigm of positive psychology, explored factors that helped adolescents adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent. The first chapter provides an overview of the study and is an introduction to the study as a whole. The introduction is followed by a short motivation for conducting the study, as well as a discussion of the

relevance of researching factors that help adolescents adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent, particularly in South Africa.

The chapters that follow provide a structured representation of the theoretical framework, literature review, method, results and discussion, and complete the study with a conclusion and recommendations.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the theoretical underpinnings that guided the present research are discussed. Firstly, positive psychology is defined, explored and compared to traditional psychology, and the reasons for its relevance to this particular study are given. Secondly, within the broader paradigm of positive psychology, two theories relevant to adolescents exposed to parental death will be discussed on an intra- and inter-personal level, namely Antonovsky's sense of coherence theory (intra-personal level) and Bowlby's lifespan attachment theory (inter-personal level).

#### **2.2 Positive psychology**

In positive psychology the focus is on positive individual characteristics and positive subjective experiences that advance life quality and minimise pathologies that arise during times of suffering (Linley et al., 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Moreover, the aim is to compensate for the imbalance in the psychology literature by focusing on positive outcomes in times of crisis, and the creation of meaning during times of suffering (Linley et al., 2006).

Within the positive psychology paradigm, the focus is on positive human functioning by exploring individuals' strengths and assets (Sheldon & King, 2001). More specifically, positive psychology aims to re-engage the ordinary individual, with the attention focused on discovering what is currently working, what is right and what can be improved. It explores the nature of a human being who functions optimally and who can adapt positively, overcome

difficulties and learn new skills (Sheldon & King, 2001). The majority of psychologists agree that, in spite of all the challenges and problems a person faces, most people are able to live purpose-driven lives with dignity (Sheldon & King, 2001).

Furthermore, positive psychology studies positive human functioning on multiple levels. These levels include the personal, biological, cultural, relational and global scopes of life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The term *positive* in positive psychology refers to a different approach, without the purpose of replacing or ignoring traditional areas of psychology. Rather, the subject field proposes that focusing solely on illness could lead to a limited understanding of a person's disorder (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychologists emphasise five areas of human behaviour: (1) positive emotions, (2) engagement, (3) positive relationships, (4) meaning and (5) accomplishments.

### ***Positive emotions***

According to psychologists, positive emotions comprise an extensive range of feelings, such as joy, satisfaction, pride and excitement. These emotions are often associated with positive consequences, including a better quality of life, greater mental well-being and positive social relations (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

### ***Engagement***

Engagement refers to participation in activities that draw and build upon one's interests (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). True engagement is often explained as follows: an intense feeling that results in feelings of clarity and delight. Although feelings of ecstasy and clarity are core to this engagement, it is not only feelings that are involved. More specifically, these engagements need to be challenging and relatively difficult, yet still probable (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

### ***Positive relationships***

Relationships are all important in fuelling positive emotions, whether they are work-related, familial, romantic or platonic (Sheldon & King, 2001). When individuals engage in positive relationships, others matter to them. More specifically, people in positive relationships share, receive and spread positivity to other individuals by means of relationships. These relationships are significant not just during good times, but also during difficult times. In fact, relationships can become stronger during difficult times by means of positive responses to one another (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon & King, 2001).

### ***Meaning***

Meaning can be described as purpose and urges the question “why?” When a person attempts to discover why things are the way they are, they can put situations in context, varying from social, work and other parts of relationships in life. When one discovers meaning, the realisation of something bigger than oneself takes place (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon & King, 2001). Discovering the bigger picture does not mean challenges will not occur. However, finding meaning enables a person to continue striving for purpose-driven goals (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

### ***Accomplishments***

Accomplishments are the search for mastery and achievement. In some cases, accomplishments are pursued even when they do not lead to positive emotions, relationships or meaning (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon & King, 2001). More specifically, accomplishments can be distinct or communal, pleasurable or effort based (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

### **2.2.1 Comparing positive psychology and traditional (mainstream) psychology**

Instead of focusing on defining a problem and finding ways to treat it by using a number of techniques, which is generally the main focus of traditional psychology, positive psychology offers a person opportunities for self-development (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). More specifically, it offers a person the chance to help find in his or her inner strengths, concentrating more on proactive steps to use his or her own skills to flourish in the world (Snyder et al., 2011).

Traditional psychology focuses on the past, present and future behaviours of an individual, and how traumatic events contribute to his or her overall functioning. In contrast, the focus in positive psychology is on positive human development rather than on pathology (Snyder et al., 2011).

Both psychological approaches aim to help people better understand themselves and others and how to live optimally and purposefully. However, the focus of this study was on exploring factors that helped adolescents adjust and continue with life after losing a parent. Therefore, a positive psychology approach will be most relevant.

## **2.3 Antonovsky's sense of coherence theory**

### **2.3.1 History of and background to sense of coherence**

Sense of coherence theory was initiated when Antonovsky (1987) developed an interest in *salutogenesis*. The term *salutogenesis* can be described as endorsing health during stressful life events, instead of being self-destructive (Herbst, Coetzee, & Visser, 2007). The *salutogenic* approach views stressful life events as manageable processes that create effective and positive functioning and enable a person to cope during adverse circumstances. Sense of

coherence is one of the main concepts within the *salutogenic* paradigm (Antonovsky, 1987). In this section (2.3) I explore how a strong sense of coherence influences the process of adjusting and continuing with life after the death of a parent.

### **2.3.2 Defining sense of coherence**

An example of a positive life perspective is provided by Antonovsky (1990), who introduced the *salutogenic* concept of ‘sense of coherence’ as a universal angle from which to view the world. More specifically, Antonovsky (1990) suggests that the way people view their life has a positive influence on their health and life quality. A *salutogenic* approach focuses on factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause disease. More specifically, this approach focuses on coping in adverse situations and successfully overcoming difficulties (Erikson & Lindström, 2005).

Sense of coherence is defined by Löyttyniemi, Virtanen and Rantalaaho (2004) as an individual’s ability to relate to and make sense of the world we live in. A different clarification of sense of coherence is given by Eriksson and Lindström (2005), who view sense of coherence as a personal way of acting, thinking and being, along with an inner belief that leads individuals to benefit, identify, use and re-use the resources that they have. This globally accepted salutogenic concept (in psychology) constitutes the expression of a person’s pervasive and lasting sense of confidence and it consists of three dimensions, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

### **2.3.3 Dimensions of sense of coherence**

#### **2.3.3.1 Comprehensibility**

Comprehensibility is defined as the degree to which an individual perceives stimuli, deriving from external or internal environments, as arranged, predictable and meaningful (Strümpfer, 1995). The more consistent early personal experiences, the stronger a person's sense of comprehensibility will be. Consistent and predictable experiences help people expect and understand what events may occur in a given situation, and how to adapt better to the situation (Davis & Noleen-Hoeksema, 2001; Muller & Rothmann, 2009). When a person's ability to comprehend is low it indicates that the person experiences the world as disordered and unpredictable (Sullivan, 1993).

#### **2.3.3.2 Manageability**

Manageability is the extent to which a person can cope during problematic circumstances. Moreover, it refers to how stressful conditions are incorporated into the complete life plan. Stressful conditions are given meaning by including them in the cognitive and motivational sphere of one's life (Davis & Noleen-Hoeksema, 2001; Muller & Rothmann, 2009). Individuals with a sense of manageability will be able to adapt during stressful situations by using the necessary resources to cope with both the circumstances and their consequences (Strümpfer, 1995). Life overall will not feel uncontrollable or overpowering if the individual has a strong sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1984; Sullivan, 1993).

#### **2.3.3.3 Meaningfulness**

Meaningfulness refers to whether these stresses are tasks worth investing in and committing to. When a person has a strong sense of coherence, he/she will have better self-esteem and life-structure and, evidently, a better quality of life (Davis & Noleen-Hoeksema, 2001;

Erikson & Lindström, 2005; Muller & Rothman, 2009). When an individual experiences life as a burden it is often a sign of a low sense of meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1984). In contrast, an individual who feels in charge of his or her destiny, and can make sense of life on a cognitive and emotional level, has a high sense of meaningfulness (Sullivan, 1993). In other words, when an individual can combine a challenge with meaningfulness, he/she will view it as a task worth investing energy in.

Erikson and Lindström (2005) performed a descriptive study and analytically explored the correlation between sense of coherence and quality of life. Their study included 458 scientific publications and 13 doctoral theses on *salutogenesis*. The main objective was to investigate the relationship between sense of coherence and quality of life. The results indicated that sense of coherence has an impact on quality of life; the stronger the sense of coherence, the better the quality of life (Erikson & Lindström, 2005).

A South African qualitative study conducted by Waddington (2004) examined the role that sense of coherence plays in the coping and non-coping features of bereavement. The study involved 27 individuals who had recently lost a loved one due to terminal illness or anticipated death (Waddington, 2004). The results indicated that individuals who can comprehend what has happened, give meaning to the traumatic event and have a sense of manageability were better able to cope with bereavement. Further analyses of the data showed that coping individuals displayed a significant preference for feeling and judging and had a high level of sense of coherence, whilst non-coping individuals showed a preference for intuition and had a low level of sense of coherence.

## **2.4 Bowlby's lifespan attachment theory**

There are various viewpoints regarding what influences an adolescent's response to the loss of a primary attachment figure such as a parent. Principal amongst these theories is Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory.

### **2.4.1 Bowlby's attachment theory and its relevance to parentally bereaved adolescents**

Bowlby's attachment theory is relevant to this study, since a parent is one of a child's primary attachment figures. When this attachment bond is ended during adolescence due to causes such as parental death, an adolescent is exposed to the loss of a primary attachment figure. It is crucial to find constructive ways of forming new attachment bonds with other important figures to enhance optimal adjustment after the death of a parent (Allen, Porter, McFarland, McElhaney, & Marsh, 2007; Bowlby, 1980; Dubois-Comtois, Cyr, Pascuzzo, Lessard, & Poulin, 2013). It is essential for adolescents to have secure attachment bonds as a result of experiencing love and compassion and, simultaneously, caring for and loving others (Bowlby, 1980). Finding secure attachment bonds is particularly important during adolescence, since adolescents are in the midst of forming their identities, experiencing bodily changes and becoming emotionally more independent. Secure attachment bonds will positively affect the adolescent's psychological well-being during these changes (Allen et al., 2007; Bowlby, 1980; Dubois-Comtois et al., 2013).

### **2.4.2 The importance of attachment bonds even beyond death**

Bowlby's (1980) theory indicates why the bond created between a primary attachment figure (parent) and an adolescent child is not terminated when the attachment figure (the parent) passes away, but instead becomes internalised through the bereavement process, enabling the relationship to continue after the death of the parent. It is important that this bond between a



primary attachment figure (parent) and adolescent remains on-going after death, as it provides the individual with a foundation for support and safety (Bowlby, 1980).

A person develops attachment bonds with different family members and friends, who can significantly influence an adolescent's development, particularly during trauma and death (Holmes, 1993; Merlo & Lakey, 2007). These attachment bonds do not need to be disengaged when death occurs (Merlo & Lakey, 2007; Stroebe, Stroebe, & Domittner, 1988); rather, these bonds are internalised and transformed into on-going bonds (Bowlby, 1980; Merlot & Lakey, 2007; Stroebe et al., 1988). These on-going bonds allow the adolescent to come to terms with the death, which will enable him/her to form new attachment bonds with other attachment figures.

Although adolescents are less dependent on a parent than they are during early childhood and are able to form new attachment bonds over time, a remaining parent still plays a crucial role in their emotional development, particularly during the early bereavement stages (Garzouzie, 2011; Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

When a parent dies, the process of emotional and cognitive development is instantly interrupted. The adolescent's life changes rapidly, as the parent he/she used to turn to for emotional support and guidance during times of crisis is absent (Noppe & Noppe, 2004; Schlozman, 2003). These rapid changes can lead to increased feelings of anxiety, depression or insecurity. Furthermore, if the necessary resources and attachment bonds have not been developed successfully, the loss of a parent may have a negative impact on the adolescent's bond with other significant attachment figures, such as the remaining parent, extended family, friends or future spouse (Field, Gao, & Paderna, 2006).

### **2.4.3 The benefits of secure attachment bonds for parentally bereaved adolescents**

When an adolescent has secure attachment bonds, positive mental development and emotional recuperation are promoted (Garzouzie, 2011; Noppe & Noppe, 2004; Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Moreover, when the remaining attachment figure is compassionate and supportive towards the adolescent, it will enable the adolescent to have a more positive bereavement experience, and the adolescent will be more likely to adjust and continue with life (Noppe & Noppe, 2004). Optimal adjustment therefore is promoted by continuing bonds throughout the adolescent's development, which promotes long-term positive effects for the adolescent (Field et al., 2006; Garzouzie, 2011).

Long-term positive effects of secure attachment bonds are related to psychological, social and cognitive factors (Noppe & Noppe, 2004). More specifically, secure attachment bonds have been associated with acceptable emotional expression and positive peer relations and social skills (Noppe & Noppe, 2004). When an adolescent has a secure attachment bond with the remaining parent or other attachment figures, and they are able to share the same emotional language, the adolescent will be able to have a greater understanding of his or her own, and others', emotions (Noppe & Noppe, 2004).

Understanding other's emotions will minimise risks for aggressive and anti-social behaviour, and will enable individuals to develop close friendships (Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Experiencing close friendships will cause the adolescent to be liked by others, which will contribute to a more positive self-image (Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Whether these positive effects will be lasting depends largely on the relationship status between the remaining attachment figures and the adolescent.

Moreover, since a parent is a primary attachment figure, losing a parent has a significant effect on a child, particularly an adolescent. More specifically, an adolescent is in the midst of various developmental phases, such as transforming from childhood to adulthood and from being dependent on the attachment parent to becoming more independent.

Since adolescence is a period of various transformations, it is important to acknowledge the value and role of attachment bonds in parentally bereaved adolescents. Secure attachment bonds will allow for a more positive bereavement experience. These attachment bonds with important figures can range from bonds with friends and members of the extended family, to bonds with community members and teachers or sport coaches. However, despite having these supportive attachment figures, it can also help a bereaved adolescent to continue his/her bond with the deceased parent (Noppe & Noppe, 2004; Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

Continuing an attachment bond with the deceased parent will provide comfort during suffering and, in time, will contribute to the process of adjusting and continuing with life after the death of the parent. A parentally bereaved adolescent's adjustment is also influenced by context. More specifically, early events and the nature of the attachment bonds may influence future decisions and attachment bonds (Noppe & Noppe, 2004; Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

Attachment bonds are necessary for parentally bereaved adolescents to adjust optimally in the long term. These attachment bonds will vary in closeness and significance. However, the importance of these relationships lies in the fact that they form a basis for building future attachment bonds with important figures. Moreover, having secure attachment bonds with these attachment figures will help with the process of adjustment, and also help combat feelings of loss and isolation during the process of mourning a deceased parent.

## 2.5 Conclusion

On an intra-personal level, an adolescent with a strong sense of coherence is more likely to cope better after the death of a parent. Having a strong sense of coherence will help the adolescent face adversity by keeping perspective and staying level-headed. An adolescent with a strong sense of coherence will experience his or her parent's death as structured and understandable (comprehensibility). Moreover, the adolescent will feel as if he or she can cope during stressful events and simultaneously incorporate these events into his or her life plan (manageability). Lastly, he or she will feel that life makes sense and that challenges are worthy of commitment (meaningfulness). However, although intra-personal strengths are helpful in coping with the death of a parent, having support on an inter-personal level is equally important during difficulties in life.

On an inter-personal level, attachment bonds play a central role in the adolescent's process of adjustment and his/her ability to continue with life after the death of a parent (Field et al., 2006). If the adolescent forms secure attachment bonds with attachment figures such as friends, extended family and supportive community members, there is a greater possibility of optimal adjustment after the death of a parent (Field et al., 2006; Owens & Suiter, 2007). In contrast, if the adolescent only has access to insecure attachment bonds, he or she will be more likely to suffer from health and psychological problems later in life (Owen & Suiter, 2007). Moreover, having an on-going bond with the parent, even after death, will provide comfort during times of suffering and, in time, contribute to the process of adjusting and allowing new attachment bonds to be formed with other people.

Since the primary aim of this study was to identify factors that helped adolescents to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent, a combination of Antonovsky's sense of coherence theory and Bowlby's attachment theory within the broader paradigm of positive

psychology are most relevant. In the next chapter the literature review is presented, in which previous studies similar to this one are explored and discussed.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

#### 3.1 Introduction

Adolescence is a time during which young people experience various developmental tasks that allow them to shape their identity, distinguish themselves from their family members and establish them as individuals in a particular peer group (Balk & Corr, 2009). These processes are influenced by, or may influence, the way an adolescent experiences coping with the death of a parent and, depending on circumstances, they may have implications for an adolescent's development and future life (Balk & Corr, 2009).

Since adolescents are in the midst of various developmental processes they are more vulnerable to loss, particularly when losing a parent (Balk & Corr, 2009; Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013). Balk and Corr (2009) define the beginning of adolescence as the start of puberty. They also divide adolescence into three separate developmental stages (Balk & Corr, 2009).

The first stage is called *early adolescence* and is known as the time from puberty through to 14 years old, mainly the phase in which adolescents attend primary school (Balk & Corr, 2009). The second stage, known as *middle adolescence*, stretches from 15 to 17 years old, primarily the high school years. This developmental phase accentuates the developmental problems of intimacy and individuality (Balk & Corr, 2009). These issues often are still present during the third stage (*late adolescence*), during which the adolescent moves on to a more independent level, such as starting to work or undertaking tertiary studies. The third phase typically ends when the adolescent reaches adulthood. The transition from late

adolescence to adulthood typically starts at the age of 18 and ends at the age of 24 (Arnett, 2007).

This view of adolescence reflects three distinct phases, each with its own development issues and challenges. When an adolescent loses a parent, the issues and challenges distinct to each phase may become adverse. More specifically, when an adolescent loses a parent, he or she may become either stagnated in one phase, or issues or tasks known to a phase may remain unresolved and resurface during adulthood (Balk & Corr, 2009; Ringler & Hayden, 2000; Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003; Sugarman, 2014). It therefore is essential to know how to support a bereaved adolescent, since various studies indicate a greater incidence of psychological problems in adolescents who have lost a parent (Balk & Corr, 2009; Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003).

Three prominent themes arose from the literature on an intra- and inter-personal level. These themes are discussed further on and employed as primary factors that help adolescents adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent. The themes are the importance of social support during adolescent bereavement, the role of the remaining parent, and the role that sense of coherence plays in the adjustment of parentally bereaved adolescents. In addition, a brief overview is given of other relevant resources regarding adolescent adjustment and recovery after losing a parent. These are remaining in an on-going relationship with the deceased, the use of physical prompts, attending a grief camp, and spirituality. The insight gained from the literature review guided the open-ended questions that I put to the participants in this study (see Addendum B).

### **3.2 Social support during adolescent bereavement**

Although adolescents are likely to have developed a comprehensive understanding of loss and death, researchers have also distinguished a distinctive quality of adolescents' idea of death (Noppe & Noppe, 2004; Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003). Adolescents' understanding of death points to grief reactions that differ from adults' reactions (Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003). More specifically, Balk and Corr (2009) describe the lasting quality of the grief symptoms of a bereaved adolescent. Biank and Werner-Linn (2011) also distinguish this lengthy feature of adolescent bereavement. In another study, Harris (1991) examined the difference between adolescent and adult grief. Harris (1991) indicated that adolescents experience significantly higher levels of distress after experiencing the death of a loved one compared to adult grievers. The reasons for the prolonged bereavement experience are often linked to the developmental phase in which the death occurred (Balk & Corr, 2009).

A study conducted by Servaty-Seib and Haysip (2003) examined the differential impact losing a parent has on (a) adolescents and (b) adults. Eighty-four parentally bereaved adolescents and 97 parentally bereaved adults completed the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief and the Hopkins Symptom Checklist, in addition to answering questions regarding their perceptions of the parent's death (Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003). The results indicate that adolescents experience grief and negative interpersonal perceptions more intensely than do adults. Moreover, the results showed that adolescents were significantly more sensitive to the death of a parent. In addition, the findings emphasise the importance given to investigating the availability, timeliness and efficacy of social support and interventions designed to lessen loneliness and isolation from others when a parent dies during this life phase (Servaty-Seib & Haysip, 2003). The study emphasised the underrated importance ascribed to social support, and that the majority of adolescents battled with parental bereavement.



Social support is important after the occurrence of traumatising life events such as losing a parent (Garzouzie, 2011; Ringler & Hayden, 2000; Walker & Shaffer, 2007). Ringler and Hayden (2002) in particular stress the importance of social support from an epidemiological evidence point of view. According to them, adolescents who have lost a parent have a greater incidence of problems than adolescents who still have both parents. Problems experienced by bereaved adolescents often include depression, anxiety, anti-social behaviour and commitment issues. Ringler and Hayden (2000) therefore point out the importance of strengthening already established support systems via interventions. For example, group meetings can be arranged in which parents will learn skills to assist their bereaved adolescent child in ways that benefit both the adolescent and the parent-adolescent relationship (Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

A study conducted by Walker and Shaffer (2007) explored the effects of bereavement on 168 adolescents between the ages of 17 and 25 approximately two years after his or her parent's death. They established that adolescents who experienced poor social support have difficulty coming to terms with the death of their parent. In contrast, adolescents who experienced strong social support had a more positive bereavement experience and could adjust and continue with life after the death of the parent (Ringler & Hayden, 2000; Walker & Shaffer, 2007).

Walker and Shaffer (2007) focused specifically on understanding an adolescents' psychological experiences of parental bereavement, as well as understanding the psychological effects accompanying this grief. One way to attempt to understand an adolescent's psychological experiences is by providing individual or group counselling by a health professional who specialises in adolescent bereavement (Walker & Shaffer, 2007). The remaining parent can also be provided with information on how to promote healthy

bereavement in order to facilitate resilience against unhealthy adjustment (Garzouzie, 2011; Walker & Shaffer, 2007).

Forming solid support networks will allow the development of secure attachment bonds between an adolescent and a secure attachment figure (Balk & Corr, 2009; Benkel, Wijk, & Molander, 2009; Garzouzie, 2011). Similarly, forming support networks with a variety of other supportive figures will facilitate resilience against feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Supportive figures can include the remaining parent, immediate family members, peers and community members (Balk & Corr, 2009; Garzouzie, 2011; Ringler & Hayden, 2000). These supportive figures contribute significantly to adolescents' more positive experience of bereavement (Garzouzie, 2011; Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Furthermore, the adolescent's experience of social support stems from the significance of the attachment to these specific figure(s) and, as a result, influences the adolescent's coping strategies during traumatic life events (Balk & Corr, 2009; Garzouzie, 2011; Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

Ringler and Hayden (2000) conducted a study in Washington in the USA in which they surveyed 85 participants (aged 17 to 20 years) to examine the incidence, experience and perceptions of social support after an adolescent's loss of a parent. They reported that 40% of adolescents who have lost a parent found a peer most helpful, 26% found the remaining parent most valuable, 16% depended most on another family member and 10% were supported most by a counsellor. These sources of support most often entailed the provision of sustained emotional support. This included speaking and paying attention to the bereaved, feeling understood by them, and the supportive figure making as few remarks as possible. Finding solutions for problems and distracting the adolescent from current feelings were also

regarded as sources of support (Benkel et al., 2009; Hansen, Cavanaugh, Vaughan, & Sikkema, 2009).

Furthermore, Ringler and Hayden (2000) reported that bereaved adolescents rely significantly on peers for emotional and psychological support and comfort. More specifically, bereaved adolescents view their peers as their confidantes, with whom they share their deepest emotions and thoughts. Adolescents have also reported that receiving support from peers helps lessen feelings of isolation and loneliness (Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

Similarly, studies conducted by Benkel et al. (2009) and Hansen et al. (2009) report that adolescents are comforted by their peers, who provide them with a temporary distraction from their emotional suffering. Moreover, when an adolescent experiences peer friendships that foster a sense of belonging and acceptance, a secure base is formed from which he/she can develop supporting relationships (Benkel et al., 2009; Holland, 2008). These supporting friendships, in turn, facilitate the development of an independent sense of self (Balk & Corr, 2009; Benkel et al., 2009). When adolescents develop an independent sense of the self, they are able to proclaim the self-directed nature of the self, they understand their inner qualities and they can engage in stimulating and sensible conversations with other individuals without feeling threatened or inferior. When an adolescent has an independent self, he/she naturally attracts other individuals with a similar disposition, which enables him/her to engage in healthy and enjoyable conversations (Balk & Corr, 2009).

It is also important to acknowledge that, although these supportive figures may be present, the process of bereavement may affect these relationships negatively. The interpersonal and social changes that occur simultaneously with these feelings of loss can worsen the trauma (Noppe & Noppe, 2004). More specifically, Noppe and Noppe (2004) indicate that

adolescents who have recently been parentally bereaved often experience destructive changes in their level of attachment to their friends. As a result, the adolescent may feel alone and excluded from the peer group and develop a negative perception of relationships with peers, adding to feelings of insecurity. The feeling of exclusion and isolation may then influence the adolescent's level of anxiety. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge the fact that the link between the adolescent's developmental stage and level of attachment to their social networks is closely connected to, and strongly affects, the adolescent's well-being (Noppe & Noppe, 2004).

### **3.3 The role of the remaining parent in the bereaved adolescent's life**

Losing a parent during adolescence is particularly difficult, since adolescents are in the midst of various developmental processes. More specifically, adolescence is a period of transitioning from childhood (dependent on his or her parent) to adulthood (independent from his or her parent) (Balk & Corr, 2009; Brotman, Gouley, Klein, Castellanos & Pine, 2003). How adolescents develop a sense of self, become independent and relate to others depends largely on their relationship with the remaining parent (Balk & Corr, 2009; Brotman et al., 2003).

The available research suggests that one of the main factors mediating an adolescent's mental health and psychological adjustment to parental loss is the attendance of a compassionate and supportive remaining parent (Brotman, et al., 2003; Saldinger, Porterfield, & Cain, 2004). The parent provides the adolescent with emotional support, allowing him/her to express conflicting thoughts, feelings and fears (Brotman et al., 2003; Saldinger et al., 2004; Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013). Moreover, when the remaining parent can provide the bereaved adolescent with open and reliable caregiving, it will limit potential long- and short-term adverse outcomes for the adolescent (Lueken & Lemery, 2004; Lueken, Kraft, Appelhans, &

Enders, 2009). Adverse outcomes include anxiousness, conduct disorders and other disruptive behaviours such as depression (Lueken & Lemery, 2004).

It is equally important for the parent to be confident in accepting support for *themselves* (Brotman et al., 2003). More specifically, an adolescent's adjustment to the death of a parent is greatly influenced by the surviving parent's ability to attend to his or her own grief-related needs so as to create and sustain a consistent and nurturing environment (Brotman et al., 2003; Saldinger et al., 2004).

A study performed by Kalter et al. (2002) highlights the role the remaining parent plays in the adolescent's adjustment and well-being after the death of a parent. Kalter et al.'s (2002) study examined 40 parentally bereaved children and/or adolescents (age 6 to 16; 22 girls and 18 boys). The remaining parent and child/adolescent were interviewed, and directed homogeneous measures such as the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) and Brief self-report measure (BSI) were used. The purpose of these measures was to measure the way in which the child/adolescent had adjusted emotionally roughly a year and a half after the parent's death. While the results indicated a close correlation between the parents' reports of their children/adolescents' adjustment and the teacher's reports, it differed significantly from the children/adolescents' self-feedback report (Kalter et al., 2002). Overall, the children/adolescents appeared to adjust well emotionally with regard to the death of their parent. However, what stood out most was the fact that parent adjustment was pointed out to be one of the best predictors of child/adolescent adjustment (Kalter et al., 2002). This once again sheds light on the importance of the remaining parent looking after him/herself in order to support his/her children/adolescents during the bereavement process (Kalter et al., 2002).

In contrast, if the remaining parent is focused solely on his or her own grief, the loss of the deceased parent is felt more severely within the family unit, and particularly by the adolescent (Lueken & Lemery, 2004; Lueken et al., 2009). One way of facilitating support to the remaining parent is by providing a space in the community where clinicians can help the remaining parent facilitate his or her adolescent's grief responses, and thus alleviate chances that the adolescent will suffer from mental health adversities (Lueken & Lemery, 2004; Lueken et al., 2009).

Family Matters is a programme focused on helping families (adolescents) who recently lost a parent (Lueken et al., 2009). The programme can be implemented in communities and provides treatment to the remaining parents and adolescent or child (Lueken & Lemery, 2004; Lueken et al., 2009). Family Matters provides therapy to the remaining parent and bereaved adolescents with the purpose of (a) helping the adolescent with his or her grief-related problems and (b) supporting the remaining parent to adjust to the new family structure (Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013). In this way, both the adolescent and remaining parent can benefit from relying on supportive community interventions and family members (Balk & Corr, 2009).

A similar programme, known as the Family Bereavement Programme, supports families that have lost a parent. The programme was implemented in the USA with the purpose of helping children and/or adolescents (ages 8 to 16) acquire skills that promote more resilient futures (Sandler et al., 2003). The Family Bereavement Programme focuses on two distinct groups, the (a) remaining parent and (b) adolescents and/or children, with the purpose of minimising adaptive risks factors and enhancing protective factors for bereaved children and/or adolescents (Sandler et al., 2003). One hundred and fifty-six families (244 children and adolescents) were randomly assigned to the programme. The families participated in

assessments pre-test, post-test and an 11-month follow-up (Sandler et al., 2003). The results indicated that the Family Bereavement Programme enhanced the remaining parent's parenting skills and decreased risk factors at the post-test stage for the children and/or adolescents. At follow-up, the programme led to reduced internalising and externalising problems (Sandler et al., 2003).

In Arizona, USA, 440 adolescents took part in a quantitative study conducted by Wolchik, Trein, Sandler and Ayers (2006). Wolchik et al. (2006) identified three self-regulating beliefs amongst parentally bereaved adolescents: fear of abandonment, coping efficiency and self-confidence. The study examined how these three aspects interact with the relationship between (a) stressors and the quality of the remaining parent-adolescent relationship, (b) the parentally bereaved youth's overall grief and (c) the parentally bereaved youth's invasive feelings of grief. The results indicated that fear of abandonment mediated the effect of stressors and relationship quality on both measures of grief. Coping efficiency mediated the path from relationship quality to overall grief, while fear of abandonment presented a marginal potential mediational relationship between stressors and intrusive grief feelings (Wolchik et al., 2006). When not including the mediators, relationship quality presented a direct relationship with the parentally bereaved youth's invasive feelings of grief (Wolchik et al., 2006).

Most reported studies have focused on the adolescent's experience of parental death. However, Saler and Skolnick (1992) undertook a quantitative study in New York, exploring the onset of depression in 90 adults (aged 20 to 50 years) who had experienced parental death during adolescence. Their study focused on the quality of parenting provided by the surviving parent, and the family environment after the parent's death (Saler & Skolnick, 1992). Data collection instruments that were used included the Parental Bonding Instrument, the

Mourning Behaviour Checklist, and the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire (Saler & Skolnick, 1992). Their results indicated a higher incidence of depression amongst participants who had not had a supportive remaining parent during adolescence. Moreover, their findings highlight the importance of support from, and open communication with, the surviving parent, as well as the significance of sharing emotions and fears (Saler & Skolnick, 1992).

Similarly, Stokes's (2014) study established that the relationship between the remaining parent and the adolescent had a significant relationship with the adolescent's adjustment and ability to continue with life after the death of a parent. If the remaining parent provides an environment of structural and emotional consistency, the adolescent will be more likely to build an open relationship with the remaining parent, and this will help the adolescent to adjust, as well as minimise his/her chances of experiencing mental health problems later in life (Stokes, 2014; Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013). If the environment is destructive and emotionally not supportive, the bereaved adolescent will be more likely to adjust poorly after the death of a parent.

In conclusion, if the remaining parent and adolescent share the same emotional language they will be able to talk about change, loneliness and loss (Stokes, 2014; Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013). It therefore is important that the adolescent and parent communicate effectively, as this will provide a buffer against suppressed emotions and long-term trauma. Moreover, when a parent and an adolescent are able to communicate effectively, it brings them together in their loss and they can support each other in overcoming their grief (Stokes, 2014). Therefore, the remaining parent plays an essential role in the adolescent's ability to adjust and continue with life after losing a parent.



### **3.4 Other relevant resources regarding positive adolescent adjustment**

From the literature it appears that adolescents have a number of resources supporting them while adjusting and continuing with life after the death of a parent. The following resources are emphasised in the literature: having an on-going relationship with the deceased parent; physical prompts; grief camps for parentally bereaved adolescents; and spirituality (religion).

#### **3.4.1 An on-going imaginary relationship with the deceased parent**

The available research has emphasised that encouraging adolescents to continue an imaginary relationship with their parent after they have passed away is important (Balk & Corr, 2009). Having meaningful conversations with the deceased parent is comforting and helps fight against life's hardships, such as disappointment or criticism. Moreover, maintaining a relationship with the deceased parent will provide adolescents with a sense of connection and comfort during life achievements in the future and enable them to adjust and cope with their loss (Balk & Corr, 2009).

One particular way adolescents can continue bonds with a deceased family member or friend is via Facebook, an online social media platform. More specifically, adolescents can post photos and write messages about the deceased, or post a public or personal message either on the deceased's Facebook wall or private inbox (Balk & Corr, 2009).

James (2014) undertook a qualitative study in Colorado in the USA with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the adolescent grief experience when it is being lived out through an online social media site, Facebook. The primary research question in the James (2014) study was: "What is the grief experience like for adolescents who use Facebook for grief support by communicating with the deceased and with other grieving individuals?" Eight high school students agreed to participate in this study. Each adolescent had

experienced the death of a peer within the previous two years and acknowledged that they used Facebook as a means of support in their grief. The participants took part in two interview sessions with the researcher. Four major themes emerged from the text: remembering the deceased, self-expression of grief, connecting with the living, and continuing bonds with the deceased (James, 2014). These themes led to results that support the use of online social media in adolescent grief. Understanding the importance of social media is critical for any person who works as a helping professional with adolescents (James, 2014). Because of the rapid developments occurring in technology and in online social media, future research possibilities could be endless (James, 2014).

### **3.4.2 The benefits of physical prompts**

Apart from the adolescent's narrative ways of communicating with the deceased, a number of adolescents have reported the benefits of physical prompts (Balk & Corr, 2009). Physical prompts can facilitate adolescents to maintain an on-going positive bond with the deceased parent. For example, adolescents may use memory boxes to strengthen their identity and relationship with the deceased parent (Balk & Corr, 2009). In many instances, a memory box may help an adolescent to consciously focus on positive memories they have of the deceased (Balk & Corr, 2009). This is also a useful tactic to fight against feelings of guilt towards the deceased.

Another example of physical prompts is photos and written letters. The visual aspect of a photo brings forth a sense of familiarity. A written letter is a way of remembering a deceased person. Moreover, a written letter often has a descriptive and/or contextual aspect that brings back pleasant memories. Perfume, clothes and music can also be forms of tangible reminders (Wunnenberg, 2000). Some people prefer wearing the deceased's clothes and/or perfume as a reminder of him or her (McKissock & McKissock, 2006; Wunnenberg, 2000). Being able to

smell something familiar or feel a certain texture can remind one of certain tangible aspects of the deceased (McKissock & McKissock, 2006). Lighting a candle on certain occasions, such as the deceased's birthday, Christmas or anniversary of the death, is also often used to remember the deceased (Adams, 2005; Kubler-Ross, 1969; 1975; McKissock & McKissock, 2006).

### **3.4.3 Grief camp for parentally bereaved adolescents**

McClatchey and Wimmer (2014) conducted a qualitative study in which they interviewed 16 parentally bereaved adolescents and their surviving parents in order to study the emotional impact of losing a parent to death. Their study aimed to understand the possible influence of attempts by a bereavement camp to address these issues. Their findings suggest that adolescents who have experienced parental loss may be influenced positively by going on a camp for parentally bereaved adolescents. Although sadness about the death of a loved one cannot be erased, the camp may provide adolescents with an outlet for identifying and expressing feelings of sadness in counselling groups. Moreover, attending a grief camp may help parentally bereaved adolescents to cope with social isolation, as well as with symptoms of trauma and contemplations of suicide (McClatchey & Wimmer, 2014).

### **3.4.4 Spirituality (religion)**

According to Pargament, Koenig, Tarakshwar and Hahn (2004), religion (and spirituality) forms part of a growing body of literature on coping with events in life that prove to be critical. Examples of critical life events in Pargament et al.'s (2004) study are illnesses, unfair treatment and, lastly, the death of a loved person. Pargament et al.'s (2004) study aimed to distinguish between positive and negative patterns of coping through religion and, as predicted, there were more positive methods of coping than negative. Specific positive religious coping methods reported were "seeking spiritual support, collaborative religious

coping ... [and] spiritual connection” (Pargament et al., 2004, p. 713). In relation to losing a parent, it can be said that adolescents may use spiritual support as a coping mechanism in terms of their religious and spiritual beliefs about death and eternal life (Pargament et al., 2004).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Three main themes arose from the literature as factors helping adolescents to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent. These factors include both intra- and interpersonal resources. Interpersonal factors include a supportive social network and a remaining parent. Intrapersonal factors suggest that a strong sense of coherence will aid an adolescent in adjusting and continuing with life after losing a parent.

In addition to the three main themes that emerged from the literature, four sub-themes arose as resources assisting adolescents with the process of adjusting and continuing with life after the death of a parent. Firstly, having an on-going relationship with the deceased may benefit a bereaved adolescent. Secondly, keeping physical prompts belonging to the deceased can support adolescents in remembering the deceased. Thirdly, bereaved adolescents may benefit from attending a grief camp and, fourthly, spirituality (religion) may serve as a source of strength to continue with life. This discussion is informed by the literature and builds on the notion that adolescents may use some, or all of the above, main themes and sub-themes as resources assisting them with the process of adjusting and continuing with life after the death of a parent.

In the following chapter, the research method used to identify and explore adolescents’ experiences of factors that helped them to adjust after the death of a parent is discussed. More

specifically, a step-by-step description is given of how I planned the research, and collected and then analysed the data.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology

#### 4.1 Research design

This study aimed to explore factors that helped adolescents adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent. A qualitative research strategy was viewed as an appropriate design to gain an in-depth understanding of adolescents' lived experiences of what helped them to adapt and continue with life after the death of a parent. According to Dickey-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), qualitative research focuses on understanding human behaviour, as well as the thoughts and experiences of participants. Qualitative research depends on participants to give an in-depth response to questions about their experiences and their understanding of those experiences. However, subjectivity and bias could influence the findings because the researcher is the research tool (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data.

#### 4.2 Participants

Young adults were included in the study if they were between the ages of 22 and 28. The reason I chose this particular age group, apart from the fact that they had lost a parent as an adolescent, stemmed from the various challenges faced by adolescents as they undergo the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. According to Erik Erikson's stages of human development, a young adult is generally a person in the age range of 20 to 40, whereas an adolescent is a person from 13 to 19 years of age (Jenks, 2005).

Within this developmental framework, the *early adult transition* (17 to 22 years of age) is a developmental bridge between pre-adulthood and early adulthood. *Early adulthood* is often

characterised as a phase in which a person sets goals for life that provide motivation and enthusiasm for the future (Jenks, 2005). However, within these transitions, emerging young adults encounter a number of issues as they finish school, such as holding full-time jobs, taking on other responsibilities of adulthood and committing to partnerships (Jenks, 2005). An additional inclusion criterion is that the young adult should have lost a parent between five and ten years previously. The reason for including this particular criterion points to the belief that, after a number of years have passed, the participant (adolescent) has reached a greater level of independence and ability to better reflect on, and identify, resources and helping factors that assisted him/her during his or her process of adjustment after the death of a parent.

Snowball sampling was used as sampling technique, since I thought it was the best way to gain enough participants for my study. There are some advantages to snowball sampling: Firstly, locating people of a specific population when there are no lists or other obvious sources for locating members of the population (e.g. the homeless, users of illegal drugs); secondly, it is low in cost – because the sampling technique is used to locate the hidden population, the researcher does not have to invest money and time in the sampling process; lastly, snowball sampling does not require complex planning and the number of staff used is considerably smaller in comparison to other sampling methods (Browne, 2005; Voicu, 2011).

Since I live in a student town I had relatively easy access to many young people. Thus, during this non-probability convenience sampling process, I asked the first two participants, who were known to me, to recruit further participants from among their acquaintances. The technique worked well, as my sample group grew rapidly (Burr, King, & Butt, 2012; Diccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Data was collected until the point of saturation. Fourteen people were interviewed, from which only twelve participants' data was used for this study (Burr et

al., 2012). Two participants were not included in the study as they were too young (10 years old) when their parent passed away. I excluded these two participants' data from the study, since this study focused specifically on adolescents' experiences. The 12 participants' biographical data is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

***Biographical Information of the Participants (N = 12)***

Name	Age	Gender	Age when parent passed away	Number of years since parent passed on	Gender of deceased parent	Siblings' age and gender
Shaun	21	Male	16	6	Father	Brother – 23, sister – 19
Wendy	23	Female	17	6	Father	Three brothers – 20, 31 and 34
Tina	19	Female	13	7	Father	Two brothers – 21 and 22
William	22	Male	16	6	Father	Only stepsiblings who are much older
Margo	25	Female	19	5	Father	Two sisters – 23 and 19
Jane	25	Female	12	13	Mother	Sister – 22, stepbrother – 16, stepsister – 14
Sara	26	Female	17	9	Father	Brother – 23
Lisa	23	Female	16	7	Father	Two sisters – 16 and 23
Amber	25	Female	18	7	Father	Two brothers – 31 and 33
Hailey	21	Female	14	7	Father	Brother – 23
David	23	Male	12	11	Mother	Sister – 22
Annie	23	Female	13	10	Father	Two sisters – 21 and 26



The participants' ages ranged between 19 and 26 years, nine were women and three were men. Although one inclusion criterion was that the death of a parent should have happened five to 10 years previously, for two participants it happened 11 and 13 years before. However, both of these participants had clear memories of the deaths and what helped them to adapt. I therefore decided to include both of them as participants. Ten of the 12 participants had lost a father and only two participants indicated that their mother had passed away. All the participants had siblings. However, one participant indicated that his stepbrothers and stepsisters were significantly older and had already established their own families and lives.

### **4.3 Data collection instrument**

#### **4.3.1 Semi-structured interview**

A semi-structured interview, often used in qualitative research, is an open-ended interviewing procedure that allows for new ideas to surface as a result of what the participant says. It allows the interviewer to have an attentive conversation with the participant and simultaneously to receive important information (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In contrast to a questionnaire framework, where thorough questions are formulating ahead of time, a semi-structured interview starts with more general questions. Not all questions are designed and phrased ahead of time, but rather sub-questions, formulated throughout the interview, are used for probing (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

#### **4.3.2 Relevance of semi-structured interviewing in this study**

During the semi-structured interviewing I observed the participants, whilst developing an understanding of factors that helped adolescents to adapt and continue with life after losing a parent (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### 4.3.3 Benefits of semi-structured interviewing

Semi-structured interviewing is a less intrusive way of collecting data from participants, as it encourages two-way communication (Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Edwards & Holland, 2013). The interview can be prepared ahead of time, which allows the interviewer to appear competent during the interview. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms. Additionally, semi-structured interviewing is beneficial in the sense that the information obtained from the interview may provide not only answers, but also reasons for the participant's answers (Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Edwards & Holland, 2013).

### 4.3.4 Interview process

To begin the interview the participants completed a short biographical questionnaire. Questions that were asked included *age, gender, living arrangements, age when parent died, number of years after parental death, gender of deceased parent, and whether the participant has siblings* (see Addendum C). The participants' permission was requested to digitally record the interview. Data was collected via a semi-structured interview of approximately 90 minutes in English or Afrikaans, whichever language the participant preferred. Thereafter, the interviews were transcribed and checked to ensure accuracy.

The semi-structured interview had two broad questions, namely *What was your experience of the death of your parent?* And *In your experience, what helped you to adapt and continue with life after the death of your parent?* (see Addendum B). In addition to the above questions, probing questions were used (see Addendum B). The probing questions enabled a deeper discussion of relevant themes.

#### 4.4 Procedure

Once ethical clearance was received from Stellenbosch University's Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) (Protocol number SU-HSD-000548), the data collection procedure started. Each of the identified participants was contacted by phone or visited at home. The participants who volunteered to take part in the study were informed about the aims and objectives of the study. During the visits, the confidentiality of the information and the anonymity of the participants were re-emphasised. After the participants agreed to participate in this study, they were asked to sign the consent form (see Addendum A).

The participants were free to decline to participate for any reason, even after they had signed the consent forms. If the participants had any questions or concerns after the study, they were informed that they could contact me using the contact information on the consent form. After the participants had signed the consent forms they were given a biographical questionnaire, which they had to complete in my presence (see C). Upon completion of the biographical questionnaire, I asked the participants' permission to record the interview. The interview began when I asked the participant the necessary questions to gain useful information regarding the topic.

During the interviews I familiarised the participants with my research topic, as well as the reasons behind my choice of the topic. As part of introducing my research question, I told the participants that losing my mother during adolescence was the primary reason behind my interest in adolescents' experiences of adjusting after parental death. Because of introducing myself and sharing a bit of personal information, my general feelings was that participants felt more comfortable sharing their stories, as they felt I could relate to them in their experiences of parental death and adjustment. Moreover, the participants often thanked me after the interview, mentioning that they enjoyed being interviewed.

When the interview was over, the participants were informed about their opportunity to obtain feedback on the results at a later date. I then thanked the participants for their participation, the conversation was terminated and I departed. The next step was the transcription of the interviews.

To ensure accurate and objective translation (from Afrikaans to English, where necessary) and transcription of the interviews, I immersed myself in the data and thoroughly checked the correctness of the transcriptions. I allowed enough time to transcribe the interviews accurately, ensuring that the tone and integrity of the recording were maintained. More specifically, this entailed allowing myself enough time to read and re-read the transcripts and compare them to the audio recording for accuracy. It is particularly important to gain control over your data and to ensure that the data is communicated accurately and reported correctly in the research report (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Fereday & Elimear, 2006; Guest, 2012). One way of reporting data more accurately is by taking note of non-verbal cues during the interviews. This will enable a richer understanding of the meaning of the data (Fereday & Elimear, 2006; Guest, 2012).

## **4.5 Data analysis**

### **4.5.1 The data analysis technique**

Thematic analysis allows the researcher flexibility, since multiple theories can be applied to the process of data analysis across a variety of epistemologies. Moreover, thematic analysis is well suited to large data sets. More specifically, it allows researchers to expand their range of data analyses past individual experiences (Richard, 1998; Saldana, 2009).

#### 4.5.2 Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis

Data analysis was conducted by implementing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. In phase one I familiarised myself with the dataset and transcribed the interviews into written form, while listening to the verbal audio recordings. The transcripts were then read and re-read to determine initial themes. In addition, the transcripts were checked and compared to the original audio recordings for accuracy. In the second phase, initial codes were formulated from the data, using open coding. This process entailed generating the initial codes by documenting where and how patterns occurred. This happened through data reduction, during which I collapsed the data into labels in order to create categories for more efficient analysis. Data compilation was also completed here. This involved that I made inferences about what the codes mean.

In phase three, the focus was to search for themes and to analyse these themes more broadly. Different codes were categorised into possible themes, and all the relevant coded data extracts were organised into these identified themes. Codes were then sorted into a collection of five candidate themes: *Family support*, *Social support*, *Religion*, *Strong sense of coherence as an intra-personal coping mechanism* and *Other, non-specific coping mechanisms that helped with adjusting after the death of a parent*.

In phase four the themes were reviewed. The candidate themes were refined by adding sub-themes to the main themes. The main theme, *Family support*, was broken down into three sub-themes – *Supportive remaining parent*, *The remaining parent has a supportive partner* and *Extended family support*. The sub-theme *The remaining parent has a supportive partner* was further broken down into two categories: *The partner supports the parent* and *The long-term partner offers companionship to the remaining parent (this puts the participant at ease)*. The second main theme, *Social support*, was also divided into three sub-themes – *Participant*

*has supportive friends, Supportive community and Professional support.* The sub-theme *Participant has supportive friends* was then further divided into two categories: *Friends offer emotional support to participant* and *Friends distract participant from circumstances.* The third main theme, *Religion*, has two sub-themes – *Religion as a coping mechanism* and *Religion as a means of communicating with the deceased parent.* The fourth main theme, *Strong sense of coherence as an intra-personal coping mechanism*, remained the same. The last main theme, *Other non-specific coping mechanisms that helped with adjusting after the death of a parent*, was separated into four sub-themes: *Exercising, Allowing time to prepare for the death of a parent afflicted by cancer, Tangible reminders of the deceased and Journal writing as coping mechanism.* Excerpts were extracted for each theme and organised coherently, with an accompanying narrative that characterised the results and discussion sections.

In the fifth phase, each theme was defined. This process entailed capturing certain aspects of the data. The chosen themes were then refined and rewritten in a few sentences. The sixth phase comprised the writing of the research report. Decisions were made about meaningful themes that contribute to understanding what is going on within the data. A procedure called “member checking” was then conducted to increase the credibility and validity of my study.

#### **4.6 Ethical considerations and procedures**

Once ethical clearance had been obtained from Stellenbosch University’s Research Ethics Committee (Humanities), data collection commenced. During the interviews the participant and I worked through the informed consent forms and discussed important ethical principles like anonymity, confidentiality, potential benefits to participants and/or to society, potential risks or discomforts participants may experience, participant’s right to withdraw from the study at any time with no legal consequences, and the right to refrain from answering any

questions they felt uncomfortable with. The participants were provided with the contact details of Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic should they experience discomfort at any stage or relive any trauma related to the death of their parent (see Addendum A). However, during the interviews no participants showed any obvious discomfort, thus no one was referred to the Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic.

Permission was obtained from the participants to audio record the interviews. The recordings and transcriptions were stored electronically on my laptop. The laptop is password protected to prevent any third-party access. In addition, the laptop can only be accessed by myself and my research supervisor.

Having lost a parent myself, I did my utmost to remain objective and refrain from allowing my own ideas and experiences about adjusting and continuing with life after the death of a parent, as well as possible biases, to influence the data collection and analyses. I achieved this through analysing the data from an impartial viewpoint, as well as substantiating all findings with available research.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

By implementing a qualitative research strategy, an in-depth understanding was gained of how the respondents, as adolescents, experienced what helped them to adapt and continue with life after the death of a parent. I recruited these participants via snowball sampling and conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. Once data saturation was reached, sampling stopped and data analysis was conducted, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. In the next chapter, the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the study will be reported and discussed.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Results and Discussion**

In this chapter, the main themes that were extrapolated from the data are reported and discussed. The data was categorised into themes, sub-themes and categories, as illustrated in Table 2. Thus, a deeper understanding of what helped adolescents to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent can be gained from the comprehensive nature of the data obtained through the interviewing process.

In the sections that follow, each of the themes, sub-themes and categories represented in the table above will be reported and discussed. In addition, verbatim quotes are given as examples of how the participants expressed themselves.



**Table 2*****Themes and Sub-themes and Categories that Emerged from the Data***

Theme	Sub-themes and categories
Family support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A supportive remaining parent</li> <li>• The remaining parent has a supportive partner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The partner supports the child</li> <li>○ The long-term partner offers companionship to the remaining parent (this puts child at ease)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Supportive extended family</li> </ul>
Social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child has supportive friends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Friends offer emotional support to child</li> <li>○ Friends distract child from circumstances</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Supportive community</li> </ul>
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion as a coping mechanism</li> <li>• Religion as a means of communicating with deceased parent</li> </ul>
Strong sense of coherence as an intra-personal coping mechanism	
Other non-specific coping mechanisms that helped with adjusting after the death of a parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercising</li> <li>• Allowing time to prepare for the death of a parent diagnosed with cancer</li> <li>• Tangible reminders of the deceased</li> <li>• Journal writing as coping mechanism</li> </ul>

**5.1.1 Family support**

Family support emerged as a dominant theme during the majority of the interviews with the participants. In relation to family support, three components were highlighted most by the

participants: the role of a supportive remaining parent; the remaining parent has a partner who is supportive both towards the parent and the child; and lastly, the value of extended family members.

### **5.1.2 Supportive remaining parent**

More than half of the participants in this study expressed that having a supportive remaining parent contributed fundamentally to his or her process of adjustment and recovery after losing a parent. A compassionate remaining parent attending to his or her adolescent's needs emerged as a dominant theme, as the majority of participants mentioned the value of having an honest and open relationship with his or her remaining parent. Effective communication between parent and participant also emerged from the data. Different aspects of a supportive remaining parent were reported by the participants.

Some of the participants had parents who battled with cancer, as in the case of Sara. Sara's mother had to nurse her husband during his last months of living with cancer. Sara emphasised the strong support figure and role model her mother was to her, despite carrying her own burdens of sorrow and exhaustion.

*So my ma het heeltyd sterk gebly. Sy't nooit ge-moan, al was sy hoe moeg, want sy moes die heelnag hom versorg het op die ou end toe hy so siek was. Sy't nooit ge-moan nie en dit is nogal, ek dink ter wille van ons. Sy't ook moeg geraak, maar sy't dit weggesteek. So ek sien my ma [as] die sterk rolmodel figuur wat net aangaan en aangaan en aangaan.*

In his description of the role of the remaining parent, William accentuates the value of his mother's unconditional love for him and describes the admiration he has for her as a person.

He defines her as his most valuable source of support during the adjustment process after his father's death.

*There was me and my mom at that stage, because I don't have any other siblings that were like children from my mom. And I was, like ... we are going to do this together and she is the most powerful woman and she is amazing. I mean, I have the greatest amount of respect for that woman. I love her, like I like worship her ... if it wasn't for her, I would not be here today. She accepts me unconditionally.*

David, another participant, describes the way his father supported him and his sister after his mother's death. David particularly highlights the significance of the open and comfortable relationship between his father and his sister.

*So as ek nou moet terugdink hoe ek survive het, [was] my grootste coping mechanism op daai stadium en tot en met nou, sonder twyfel my pa. My suster en my pa is ongelooflik close. Hulle is letterlik besties in alle opsigte. Byvoorbeeld, hy het vir haar die eerste [keer] toe sy moes [begin] bene skeer het, het hy vir haar gehelp en ek weet, byvoorbeeld, toe sy in seuns begin belangstel het, het sy vir hom gevra hoe om te soen.*

Lastly, Wendy, a female participant, prefers not to talk about her father's death, and considers her mother as understanding with regard to her decision not to discuss her emotions.

*Daar was definitief baie understanding. My ma het my [dit] laat hanteer soos wat ek dit wou hanteer. My ma het my nooit geforseer om enigiets te doen nie. Omdat sy geweet het ek hardloop weg, het sy my [laat gaan]. As ek vir haar gevra het ek wil gaan, dan het sy het my nooit gekeer nie.*

The participants in this study reported the value of a supportive remaining parent after losing a parent. Different facets of the remaining parent-participant relationship were highlighted. These facets include having an authentic relationship with the remaining parent. The authenticity of this relationship entails being able to communicate effectively, thus being able to share feelings and thoughts about the loss, as well as being comfortable enough to tell a parent they do not wish to speak about these emotions. The majority of the participants also indicated the significance of the compassion and love they experienced and received from their remaining parent. The emotional support, combined with effective communication, enabled the participants to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent.

These findings are consistent with those of Brotman et al. (2003) and Saldinger et al. (2004), who similarly found that one of the main factors mediating adolescents' mental health and psychological adjustment to parental loss is the attendance of a compassionate and supportive remaining parent. According to them, the parent provides the adolescent with emotional support, allowing the adolescent to express conflicting thoughts, feelings and fears (Brotman et al., 2003; Saldinger et al., 2004; Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013). However, emotional support cannot be achieved without emotional language. Emotional language enables an emotional bond through which emotional support can be given and received.

Stokes (2014) and Werner-Lin and Biank (2013) report that, when the remaining parent and adolescent share the same emotional language, they will be able to talk to each other about loss. It therefore is important that the adolescent and parent communicate effectively, as this will provide a buffer against suppressed emotions and long-term trauma (Stokes, 2014; Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013). Moreover, when a parent and an adolescent are able to communicate effectively, it brings them together in their loss and they can support each other in overcoming their grief (Stokes, 2014).

One way of facilitating support for an adolescent via effective communication is through caregiving. In particular, Leuken and Lemery (2004) and Leuken et al. (2009) state that, when the remaining parent can provide the bereaved adolescent with open and reliable caregiving, it will limit potential long- and short-term adverse outcomes for the bereaved adolescent. Therefore, the remaining parent plays an essential role in the adolescent's ability to adjust and continue with life after losing a parent.

### **5.1.3 The remaining parent has a supportive partner**

Participants whose parents had remarried, or committed to a long-term partner, often spoke about the dual role this partner fulfilled in supporting his/her family. One aspect entailed the relationship of the participant with the parent's partner. Participants who had a friendship with, and sense of mutual respect towards, the parent's partner often described the relationship as supportive and satisfying. The other aspect concerns the way the partner supports the remaining parent. More specifically, participants mentioned feeling comforted by the fact that their parent was not alone and was being supported by the partner. Both components contributed positively to the participant's adjustment after the death of his/her parent.

#### **5.1.3.1 The partner offers support to the child**

Based on the data from the interviews it was evident that a few of the participants had a strong relationship with the remaining parent's partner. In some cases, the remaining parent had been separated from the participant's deceased parent before his/her death. In other cases, the remaining parent had remarried or committed to a partner after the death of his or her previous spouse. In both cases it contributed positively to the participant's adjustment process when the remaining parent's partner was supportive of the whole family system. In addition, the majority of participants described their relationship with the partner as a friendship rather

than a parent-child relationship. In Shaun's case, something as simple as having mutual interests connected him with his mother's partner.

*[My step-dad], he's always there and he like he taught me how to hitch a trailer. All those things you need to know from a man, manly stuff ... we always had a bond ... We can talk about technology or computers and I'll tell him, did you see this new thing. and he'd say ja, so ja. We're definitely friends as well.*

David described the way his father's partner helped them with more practical adjustments, such as regaining structure within the family system. For example, his father's partner made dinner in the evenings, which they ate at the dining table as a family. She also helped David's sister with certain skills, such as dressing appropriately and being feminine.

*Party aande het ons sommer net soos letterlik viennas geëet vir aandete, of ons het aartappels in 'n sak in die mikrogolf warm gemaak ... letterlik net om iets te eet want dit is net nie 'n prioriteit op daai stadium in jou lewe nie. So my pa se huidige vrou het vir ons weer kom rigting gee en baie gehelp met, soos klein goedjies. Sy het vir ons kos gekook in die aande en ons het saam by die tafel gesit en dit geniet. Soos ek weet sy het ook vir my suster baie, baie gehelp met, soos, net eenvoudige goed soos klere styl, soos wat sosiaal aanvaarbaar is. Goeters soos make-up, goeters soos, net meisies goed. Hulle is baie oop met mekaar en ja sy is amper soos 'n vriendin vir ons. Ons het 'n baie gemaklike, 'n vriendskap verhouding, maar tog ook 'n baie groot respek tussen mekaar.*

From the data it appears that the participants who had a strong relationship with the remaining parent's partner viewed the relationship as a friendship. The majority of participants indicated that, even though the parent's partner could never replace the role of his or her deceased parent, the participant respected the partner and valued their friendship.

This strongly contradicts the viewpoint that the remaining parent's partner should fulfil an authoritative role towards the stepchild (Fine, Coleman, & Ganong, 2000).

Fine et al. (2000) similarly suggest that stepchildren often prefer that the stepparent assumes the less active role of friend rather than an authoritative role. They also established that, in cases where the stepparent shared the same views as the child or adolescent on the role of the stepparent as friend, more cohesive interpersonal adjustment was more likely to take place in stepfamilies (Fine et al., 2000).

The formation of a friendship between a stepparent and an adolescent largely is dependent on how the adolescent and stepparent communicate. Open and effective communication between the stepparent and adolescent is an important basis for building trust. Effective communication is the activity of information exchange between two or more people, where the message and intention of the message are conveyed successfully (Papernow, 2013). One way of adjusting to the new challenges posed by a stepfamily is communicating effectively. Communicating effectively is important, since a side effect of bad communication is avoidance, which may result in a poor adolescent-stepparent relationship.

Papernow's (2013) study revealed that, when an adolescent is satisfied with the stepparent, he or she is able to communicate more honestly, thus effectively bypassing avoidance in the relationship. However, despite communication being an important factor, there also are other factors to consider with regard to a successful stepparent-adolescent relationship (Fine et al., 2000).

Fine et al. (2000) suggest that good stepparent-stepchild/adolescent relationships are also characterised by fondness and love. When stepparents focus on developing friendships with step-adolescents and continue those efforts after living together as a stepfamily, the success

of the friendship is more likely to be contingent on the interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts within which they occur. Additionally, the most important component of a successful stepparent-adolescent relationship lies in the fact that the stepparent must not try to emulate or replace the deceased parent, but rather try to establish a new and solid friendship with the stepchild (Fine et al., 2000).

#### **5.1.3.2 The long-term partner offers companionship to the parent**

Most of the participants reported feeling reassured by the fact that his or her remaining parent had a supportive and compassionate partner. This feeling of security was centred on knowing that his or her parent would not grow old alone. Tina and Hailey described the important role their stepfathers played in supporting their mothers after their fathers died. Similarly, Margo was consoled by the fact that her mother had a partner, as she did not want her mother to grow old alone.

*I have a stepdad, well, when my father passed away I already had a stepdad, so that helped a lot ... I think if my mom didn't have my stepdad she would be crushed ... He really supports her... and us kids ... ” (Tina)*

*[My stiefpa] is een van die redes hoekom my ma okay is nou, soos my ma is baie lief vir hom en hy is baie goed met ons, baie regverdig ... My ma kan glad nie alleen wees nie. Ek weet soos hoe nodig my ma hom het. En my ma is dan goed met ons ook oor sy haar eie support kry van hom. Soos my ma kan nie alleen wees nie ... en soos my ma weet niks van finansies nie ... hy help haar baie soos met sulke dinge. (Hailey)*

*It helps a lot, and like you worry less, because, I mean, you don't want your parent to grow old alone. So I can't, ja, I would much, much, much rather prefer that she has someone ... than grow old alone. Can't be nice ... My mom does not know stuff like how to work with budgets etc. She needs help ... (Margo)*



From the data it seems that the participants valued having a supportive stepparent taking care of his or her remaining parent. The participants indicated the value of the remaining parent having a companion who could support him or her in their own grief-related needs and with whom he or she could grow old. In fact, the participants described the remaining parent as better fulfilling the parental role when he or she had his/her own source of support.

Similarly, Brotman et al. (2003) and Saldinger et al. (2004) indicate that it is important for the parent to be confident in accepting support for *themselves*. In fact, Kalter et al. (2002) indicate that parental adjustment is one of the best predictors of child/adolescent adjustment after parental death. One source of support amongst various others is a supportive partner or spouse.

Studies indicate that having a supportive partner or spouse is one of the most important predictors affecting a person's health and well-being (Frey & Stutzer, 2006; Myers, 1999). The commitment between the remaining parent and the stepparent/partner has a positive influence on both partners' health and, if children are involved, on the stability of the whole family system (Frey & Stutzer, 2006; Myers, 1999). Frey and Stutzer (2006) further report that this companionship provides an added source of self-esteem, as well as an escape from stress and a buffer against loneliness. When the remaining parent has his or her own source of support, he/she will be able to create and sustain a consistent and nurturing environment for the adolescent (Brotman et al., 2003; Saldinger et al., 2004).

Consistent with previous studies (Brotman et al., 2003; Saldinger et al., 2004), Stokes (2014) suggests that, when the remaining parent provides an environment of structural and emotional consistency, the adolescent will be more likely to build an open relationship with the parent.

This will also help the adolescent to adjust, as well as promote his or her chances of better health and well-being later in life (Stokes, 2014; Werner-Lin & Biank, 2013).

In contrast, participants who mentioned that their remaining parent does not have a partner are often concerned about the parent being lonely. The participants often felt compelled to go home to take care of the remaining parent, or even to keep them company on a continuous basis. Concern about the remaining parent is illustrated by Wendy, who said she went home every weekend and that she felt as if she had to take care of her mother.

*My ma is 'n bietjie meer afhanklik. Die ding is dat sy, ek weet nie of sy afhanklik voel en of ek verantwoordelik voel nie, want vandat ek universiteit toe gekom het voel ek, ek moet huis toe gaan. Sodat sy nie alleen is heeltyd nie ... So ek het half hierdie ding van ek moet na haar kyk. Ek moet kyk of sy okay is. Ek moet sterk wees vir haar, want as ek moet platval dan gaan sy. Ek het half gevoel ek moet nou na my ma kyk. En my ma is nie, sy is 'n sterk mens, maar sy is sag, sy't partykeer iemand nodig.*

From family life-course perspective, “generational time” is an important facet of well-being and development (Owens & Suiter, 2007). The term “generational time” accentuates an individual’s family position and how this position is connected to developmental challenges, responsibilities, rights and constraints. When a parent dies, major changes occur in terms of the generational placement. For example, the adolescent may be the eldest and naturally take on the responsibilities of the deceased parent.

An adolescent typically may take on certain emotional roles originally provided by the spouse, such as providing comfort during grief, or becoming the remaining parent’s source of advice and caretaker (Owens & Suiter, 2007). When these changes occur in generational placement, adolescents often suffer emotionally and socially. More specifically, an

adolescent may turn down appointments with friends and choose to rather stay at home with his or her parent out of fear that the parent might feel alone. Consequently, one can expect that, when an adolescent experiences parental loss, his/her own health, well-being and social-life can suffer (Owen & Suiter, 2007).

#### **5.1.4 Supportive extended family**

From the data it seems that, to a large extent, the extended family helped the participants to cope after losing a parent. The support ranged from practical support, such as transportation to school or sport activities, to emotional support, such as fulfilling a temporary 'parental role'. David described the significant role his grandmother played after his mother passed away. Jane spoke about her aunt, grandmother and other extended family members supporting her emotionally and temporarily fulfilling the role of 'parent figure'.

*Die dag na [my ma oorlede is] het my ouma afgekom om te kom help, ons noem haar oomsie. Sy was hier en sy is 'n ongelooflike vrou. Sy was op daai stadium 66, 65, daar rond en mens sal dink dis oud, maar sy het die hele huis op haar eie getrek. Ons het daai dag by die huis gekom, als was in bokse gepak. Als was opgepak en ons het getrek.*  
(David)

*We had a strong support system where my dad's cousin and his wife are our godparents. So we were staying with them at the time ... that support structure was there. My aunt was there; my gran was there, so, I think, without me noticing, there was a lot of, like, "moms" in my life.* (Jane)

The variability of family structures requires most families to deal with several structural family transformations during this life event and the reasons will be different for different families (Price, Price, & McKenry, 2010). During challenging times like these, family

members often need support from extended family members (Price et al., 2010). One way in which members of the extended family can offer help is by providing support to the child when his or her parent needs to attend to work-related obligations. This support may typically involve transporting the child or adolescent to school and other activities, as well as helping the child with homework or other school-related activities. According to Price et al. (2010), grandparents often fulfil a supportive role with regard to taking care of their grandchildren, and their reasons for doing so differ from context to context. In cases where the grandparents are retired, their schedules are flexible and allow them to support their grandchildren practically with transportation to school or other activities.

## **5.2 Social support**

Social support emerged as a dominant theme in the majority of interviews. More than half of the participants spoke about the positive influence social support had on their adjustment after the death of a parent. Friends offering a distraction from the participant's difficult circumstances emerged as a dominant form of social support. Above and beyond friends' roles as distraction, the participants also reported that friends played a significant role in terms of emotional support. Another form of social support that emerged from the interviews was support from community members, in particular congregational support, supportive teachers and coaches, as well as neighbours and acquaintances.

### **5.2.1 Support from friends**

From the interviews it appears that friendships fulfilled a twofold purpose with regard to supporting parentally bereaved adolescents. On the one hand, activities, vacations and social events distracted the participants from their difficult circumstances at home. On the other hand, friends fulfilled an emotional role that allowed the participants to be able to recuperate emotionally and mourn their parent.

### 5.2.1.1 Friends offering a distraction from circumstances

The participants in this sample who had lost a parent at the age of 12 to 15 explained that friends did not understand how to behave towards them emotionally after the death of the parent. More specifically, the participants' friends at that age functioned more as a distraction from current circumstances. The participants described going away with friends and their families over weekends and holidays and keeping busy. They reported that spending time with friends' families served as a distraction from their current situation at home, where they were reminded of the deceased parent and accompanying unhappiness.

Wendy and Hailey, for example, mentioned that they hardly ever spent time at home; they preferred spending time at their friends' houses. Wendy particularly indicated going to friends who still had both their parents living together. She said that having two parents in the house made her feel as if she was in a homely environment, which made it easier not to think about her circumstances.

*Die vriende na wie toe ek gegaan het, was huise met beide 'n ma en pa, waar daar 'n sterk huis gevoel was. Ek het ... ek het nie 'n huis gevoel gehad nie en ek het gegaan na 'n huis gevoel toe. (Wendy)*

*Dit was baie makliker om nie daaroor te dink as jy by 'n vriendin se huis was met haar familie, verstaan jy? Dan is jy nou maar happy en jy eet en jy chat met die ouers, of whatever, en as jy by die huis is, alleen, dan het jy nou bietjie tyd om daaroor te dink. My vriende was definitief baie supportive soos, omdat ek saam met hulle in die koshuis was voel dit soos asof jy sleepover elke aand by al hierdie vriende en ... lekker ... Dit is baie distracting en toe het ons baie close geraak ... Hulle was baie supportive. (Hailey)*

Similarly, studies conducted by Benkel et al. (2009) and Hansen et al. (2009) report that adolescents are comforted by their peers, who provide them with a temporary distraction from their emotional suffering. Holland (2008) and Balk and Corr (2009) also indicate that, when an adolescent experiences peer friendships, this fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance and a secure base is formed from which they can develop supporting relationships. This relationship can have several roles, amongst which would be to keep busy and keep their mind off their feelings of loss (Balk & Corr, 2009; Benkel et al., 2009; Holland, 2008).

#### **5.2.1.2 Friends offering emotional support**

The roles of supportive friends were accentuated by participants whose parents passed away when they were aged 16 years and older. The nature of this support centred on the sharing of emotions, being able to talk about the loss and crying together. From the interviews it seems that participants aged 16 years or older were at an age where they tended to talk about their emotions to friends. Margo described crying with friends; in fact, she mentioned hardly ever crying alone.

*I had amazing like close friends in the res that I was in Stellies ... my one friend, she would like buy a bottle of Vodka, and cigarettes and then we would go sit outside by the washing line and drink the whole bottle and smoked the cigarettes and cry ... I never actually cried alone. They all cried with me.*

Consistent with these participants' reflections, Ringler and Hayden (2000) report that bereaved adolescents rely significantly on peers for emotional and psychological support and comfort. Supporting Ringler and Hayden's (2000) claims, Holland (2008) reports that bereaved adolescents view their peers as their confidantes, with whom they share their deepest emotions and thoughts. In various studies, adolescents report that receiving support

from peers helps lessen feelings of isolation and loneliness (Holland, 2008; Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008; Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Similarly, Lafreniere, Menna and Cramer (2013) also endorses that adolescents experiencing parental loss often confide in close friends for comfort, support and recuperation.

Zimmer-Gembeck, Skinner, Morris and Thomas (2012) indicate that there are three key adolescent phases, namely early, middle and late adolescence. They suggest that middle adolescence is often characterised by intimacy and close friendships. These characteristics often still are present during late adolescence, despite the adolescent moving on to a more independent level, such as starting at work or going to college (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012). Furthermore, the physiological development of late adolescents' emotional stability and clear sexual identity are generally completed. Adolescents in this phase often invest more time in serious relationships and develop the capacity for tender and sensual love. The peer group fades in importance and is replaced by a few good friends (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012).

#### **5.2.1.3 Supportive community**

The majority of participants in this study described the community as supportive after they had lost a parent. The participants indicated that school teachers, sport coaches, neighbours and pastors showed significant support following their parent's death. The support ranged from helping the participant with transportation to school and after-school activities, and taking food to the participant and his or her family, to supporting the participants emotionally. William spoke about his coaches motivating him to be strong despite his difficult circumstances.

*I think my coaches and everybody, kind of also put that mentality into me. Like just come back stronger from this. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.*

Jane and Amber also described the effective support provided by the surrounding community after losing a parent.

*I think, without me noticing there was a lot of, like, "moms" in my life. Like, for example, my dance teacher, she's also one of the moms in my life. (Jane)*

*The church people were really supportive, because I'm part of the NG Church ... so I had a good relationship with our reverend. (Amber)*

According to Schonfeld and Quackenbush (2009), schools are an ideal environment for helping children or adolescents after death, since students spend a majority of the day at school. This setting is familiar to them and they are surrounded by trained and supportive staff (Heath & Cole, 2011; Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2009).

Moreover, children need a source of support beyond the family. Since teachers have distance from the loss and are trained to understand developmental issues, they are able to support children in a professional and objective way (Heath & Cole, 2011; Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2009). Teachers can provide support through certain approaches to learning, such as planned course work and/or group work in class. In this way, the adolescent or child will feel less isolated, succeed academically, talk with and receive support from friends and be able to communicate better with his or her family. The same approaches will help these teachers to identify situations that may need referral and connect with students on a higher level (Heath & Cole, 2011; Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2009).



David described people in the community bringing them food in the evenings for up to six months after his mother's death.

*Mense het vir ons kos aangedra en vir ons blomme aangedra, en vir baie, baie lank seker gemaak dat ons oraait is, want my pa het nog steeds voltyds gewerk. Soos as hy van agt tot vyf in die middag werk, dan moet ons maar baie staatgemaak het op au pairs en ry club. Byvoorbeeld, my pa, travel baie vir werk, so as hy weggegaan het vir werk, het ek en my suster by familie-vriende gaan bly, wat later my peetouers geraak het. Elke dag het iemand gebel en gevra of ons oraait is en gevra of ons genoeg kos het en of ons enigiets nodig het, vir soos ses maande of selfs langer.*

According to Balk and Corr (2009) and Garzouzie (2011), forming support networks with supportive community members will facilitate resilience against feelings of loneliness and isolation. Supportive community members can contribute significantly to adolescents' more positive experiences of bereavement (Garzouzie, 2011; Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Furthermore, the adolescent's experience of social support stems from the significance of the attachment to the specific figure(s) and, as a result, it influences the adolescent's coping strategies during traumatic life events (Balk & Corr, 2009; Garzouzie, 2011; Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

### **5.3 Religion**

The majority of participants in this study reported religion as being a significant part of the adjustment process after losing their parent. From the data it appears that religious beliefs had a dual purpose. More specifically, the participants indicated that they spoke to their deceased parent by means of prayer. These conversations provided comfort to the participant and signified the on-going relationship that the participant had with the parent, even after death. Other participants described religion as a coping mechanism. These participants particularly

coped by means of prayer and strong Christian beliefs that helped them make peace with the death and cope with the loss.

### 5.3.1 Religion as a coping mechanism

More than half of the participants described religion as a dominant coping mechanism that helped them accept and cope with the death of their parent. Amber described her faith in God as her main source of support after her father's death. Wendy explained that she experienced God's presence on a whole new level when she prayed for her father to rest in peace.

*Above all I think faith, my faith in God kind of helped me through it. It's not something I can explain, like a lot of people try and ask me like how do you define God helping you through tough times and I'm like, the only thing I know is that God does not equal pain. Well, like life happens and God's there to comfort you. God helped me cope. I know that sounds very cliché. A lot of Christians do say that, but I really do mean it. (Amber)*

*Ek was nog nooit so bewus van die Here se nabyheid nie ... Sy ondersteuning en veral met my ma, jy kon dit duidelik in die huis voel. En die aand voor my pa dood is, het ek gebid dat hy nou moet gaan. (Wendy)*

According to Pargament et al. (2004), religion (and spirituality) forms a part of the growing body of literature in terms of coping with events in life that prove to be critical. Examples of critical life events in Pargament et al.'s (2004) study are illnesses, unfair treatment and, lastly, the death of a loved person. Specific positive religious coping methods include "seeking spiritual support, collaborative religious coping ... [and] spiritual connection" (Pargament et al., 2004, p. 713). In relation to losing a parent, it can be said that adolescents may use

spiritual support as a coping mechanism in terms of his or her religious and spiritual beliefs about death and eternal life.

Park and Halifax (2011) indicate that people often describe their religion as a helpful coping mechanism and as being necessary for continuing with life after experiencing the loss of a loved person. Similarly, Benore and Park (2004) suggest that religion can have a significant influence on the bereavement process. They suggest that religion forms the basis that gives meaning and understanding to experiences that take place in everyday life. People describe religion as the foundation for making the universe seem meaningful, safe, just, comprehensible and manageable (Park & Halifax, 2011).

During highly stressful experiences such as the death of a loved one, a belief system that provides meaning can influence a person's response to loss. Amongst other religious views, Christianity includes the belief that a person's soul continues to live after the death of the physical body (Benore & Park, 2004; Klugman, 2006). These religious beliefs help Christians gain perspective and find sense in their loss and suffering.

Halifax (2008) indicates that religious beliefs may simultaneously facilitate the grieving process. Belief in "God's plan" can help a bereaved individual create meaning during loss and suffering. Finding meaning in loss will help a person cope with the death of a loved one. Apart from finding meaning in death and coping on a more individual level, a religious society can also offer support during bereavement.

Support from pastors and fellow congregants can help bereaved individuals through the loss. More specifically, religious customs suggest specific prayers and funeral rituals to cope with death. These rituals often ease the bereaved person(s) and give a sense of belonging to a broader community. These inter-personal sources of support, combined with intra-personal

coping mechanisms such as religious beliefs, aid a person in realising adequate comfort. Subsequently, this comfort allows the person to work through grief in a way that allows him/her to find peace and acceptance (Halifax, 2008).

### **5.3.2 Religion as a means of communicating with the deceased parent through prayer**

Most participants indicated that they still spoke to the deceased parent. Some described speaking to their parents by means of prayer; others explained the belief that the deceased parent is at God's side.

*When I pray I start talking to my dad and then eventually I start talking to God and, well, I believe my dad's right next to me here in the room somewhere. He's an angel and he's my guardian angel. (Tina)*

According to Bayer (2006), people talk to a deceased person by means of prayer because they believe that a flow of communication continues to exist between them and their loved ones, even after they have passed away. Christians believe that communication, love and presence can reach beyond death and, in turn, provide a sense of comfort and peace to them during and after grieving the death of a loved one (Bayer, 2006).

Moreover, Christians believe that, during a person's prayer for his or her loved ones who have passed away, the connection is purer, the forgiveness feels deeper and there is more perspective, often more so than the person's conversations with them before they passed away (Bayer, 2006). Therefore, Bayer (2006) says that communication through prayer with a deceased person is in essence undercutting much of what distanced them when both people were alive. Communicating with the deceased by means of prayer provides a sense of comfort and inner peace, and enables a person to continue with life (Bayer, 2006).

Balk and Corr (2009) report that it is important to encourage adolescents to continue communication with their parent after they have passed away. Having meaningful conversations with the deceased parent is comforting and helps fight against life's hardships, such as disappointment or criticism (Balk & Corr, 2009; Halifax, 2008). The ways these conversations take place are entirely personal and according to preference. Some people prefer talking by means of prayer, and other prefers having meaningful conversations – as if it were face to face (Balk & Corr, 2009; Halifax, 2008). Irrespective of the way one prefers to talk to the deceased, it provides a sense of comfort and connection. Having these conversations with the deceased is particularly meaningful during both life achievements and hardships (Balk & Corr, 2009).

#### **5.4 A strong sense of coherence as an intra-personal coping mechanism**

It appears that the majority of participants in this study had significant intra-personal capabilities to adjust and continue with life after the death of their parent. From the data it seems that all of the participants managed to go on with life, receive schooling and attend university, despite their adverse circumstances. Hailey referred to her personality as a factor that helped her cope with adverse circumstances after losing her father.

*Ek dink ek is 'n baie solid mens, persoonlikheid gewys, ek dink dit het definitief baie gehelp ... Maar, ek dink dis net persoonlikheid. Loss is vir party mense baie erger as vir ander mense.*

William indicated that losing a parent had advantaged him, since he now was equipped to deal with future challenges and losses.

*I basically just decided like this is something that can buckle people and it cause people to stop living. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. You come back as*

*hard as you can and I did that. I just felt like ... how powerful it made me feel afterwards. I felt like this can't stop me and if I can prove to myself that something like this can't limit me, then I'm just proving myself. I just felt that you stand up, you just get up and you never give ever up. If you can just stand up again and just move forward stronger, then you will be fine. And that's what life is. I have become involved in many other challenges in my life and I know I can do it full on without [ever feeling like I've lost], I'm not disadvantaged for losing something. I am advantaged.*

Wendy reported making a conscious decision to focus on her future, despite her current difficult situation. She focused on her school marks and studied hard for exams so that she could apply for university and be successful one day.

*Wel ek het 'n baie sterk wil gehad. Die oomblik toe ek agterkom ek begin bedruk voel, toe neem ek 'n kop-besluit. Dit het gebeur in eindeksamen, Graad 11. Dis 'n akademiese tyd en jy het nie tyd om te rou nie. My pa is gediagnoseer net na die Junie vakansie en hy is dood in November eksamen. Soos, jy wil nou akademies wees want jy wil universiteit toe gaan en wat is nou belangriker. Jy kan hartseer wees vir die res van jou lewe, [maar] jy't net hierdie tyd ... om te kan universiteit punte behaal. En toe my punte val toe besluit ek nee, my punte kan nie val nie.*

Antonovsky (1990) introduced the salutogenic concept 'sense of coherence' (SOC) as a universal angle from which to view the world. More specifically, this concept claims that the way people view their life has an influence on their health (Antonovsky, 1990). SOC is a broad term associated with coping with stress on an intra-personal level (Muller & Rothmann, 2009). When a person has a strong SOC, he or she will have greater self-esteem

and life structure and evidently a better quality of life (Eriksson & Lindström, 2005; Muller & Rothman, 2009).

More specifically, the *salutogenic* view is concerned with the relationship between health, stress, coping during adverse situations and successfully overcoming hardships (Erikson & Lindström, 2005). According to Erikson and Lindström (2005), individuals who can comprehend what has happened give meaning to the traumatic event and have a sense of manageability, and are able to cope better with a traumatic event such as losing a loved one.

## **5.5 Other non-specific coping mechanisms that aid in adjustment after a parent's death**

A few participants singled out coping mechanisms that helped them to adjust and continue with life after their parent's death. These coping mechanisms included physical exercise, having time to prepare for the death of a parent afflicted by cancer, tangible reminders of the deceased parent and, lastly, journal writing.

### **5.5.1 Physical exercise**

Almost half of the participants described physical exercise as a helpful coping mechanism after losing a parent. Sara explained that her psychologist suggested she exercise regularly. She mentioned that being active helped her fight depression, with which she battled after losing her father to cancer. It appears that working out can serve as an escape mechanism, as well as an anti-depressant. Wendy, for example, described that the moment a psychologist suggested anti-depressants she decided to exercise harder. Tina also mentioned that she went running the moment she received the news of her father's death.

*Ek het geoefen, en as ek nie geoefen het nie dan het ek slegter gevoel. Oefening help baie vir depressie. (Sara)*

*Die oomblik toe 'n sielkundige vir my op antidepressante wou sit toe besluit ek nee, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee. Jy gaan draf 'n ekstra keer die week of iets.* (Wendy)

*When I heard about my father's accident, I just went running.* (Tina)

According to Cotman and Berchtold (2002), developmental, neurobiological and psychological factors might mediate and/or moderate the association of physical activity and some mental disorders in a very dynamic way. Consequently, the effects of physical activity might stimulate a complex system. This, in turn, triggers a cascade of events that can result in higher resilience against stress-associated and mental disorders (Charney, 2004; Cohen & Rodriguez, 1995; Cotman & Berchtold, 2002). Moreover, a number of psychological factors have been associated with the therapeutic efficacy of exercise. These factors include increased self-efficacy, a sense of mastery, distraction, and changes in self-concept (Marks, 1999; Ströhle, 2008).

However, despite these positive psychological effects of exercise, Ströhle (2008) indicates that further characterisation and randomised intervention studies are needed for exercise to be regarded as a promising tool preventing the onset of specific mental disorders. Moreover, Ströhle and Holsboer (2003) suggest that the implementation and further optimisation of exercise training programmes for patients with depression need a multidisciplinary approach, involving scientists and practitioners in psychiatry, psychology, sport medicine and health-care providers, as well as public funding.

### **5.5.2 Having time to prepare for the death of a parent afflicted by a terminal illness**

Some participants, whose deceased parent's cause of death was cancer, described that having time to prepare for the death was helpful. More specifically, these participants described that allowing time to say goodbye made it easier. Sara said that she had time to deal with her



emotions for several months whilst her father was spending his last days in bed with terminal cancer. She mentioned mourning his death even before he passed away, which helped her face the actual day he died. Margo also indicated that she and her family had time to prepare for her father's death. More specifically, her father made a 'list' of all the things he wanted to take care of before he passed away, such as building a beach house, attending to financial affairs, making photo albums and writing letters to each of his daughters.

*Om te begin, ek het lang tyd gehad om afskeid te neem. Ek het baie gehuil. Dit maak dit nie ondraagliker nie, maar dit het gehelp dat ek voor sy dood al, als kon deurdink en wel kan dink oor, hy is op pad. Hy is siek, hy gaan sterf en ek kan niks vir hom doen nie. Ek dink ek het hom al voor die tyd begin rou, wat baie gehelp het. (Sara)*

*In a way, we were prepared for it because we knew, well, ja, every year he went for scans and it was all clear and as I said, as I came to Stellies, it started coming back again. So it was, in a way we were prepared. My dad ... bought us a beach house and after he passed away, like everything was finished and he organised a big book full of photographs and then each daughter, like we're three daughters and he wrote a letter to each of us. So it was, but we were prepared for it. And also like practical stuff like financial stuff. (Margo)*

According to Heiney, Hermann and Bruss (2001), the diagnosis of cancer changes a family forever. Ordinary responsibilities become increasingly demanding and parents often need assistance balancing the specific needs of their children and/or adolescents, while at the same time attending to practical matters regarding the future (Heiney et al., 2001). However, much like other prolonged sicknesses there is time to prepare plans for the future, reminisce over the past and prepare goodbyes (Okun & Nowinski, 2011).

Fenwick, Brayne and Lovelace (2007) particularly suggest that taking care of financial affairs and making sure the dying person's will is in order are aspects, amongst other factors, that can help with the adjustment process after the person's death. Although these are sensitive matters that are tough to face, dealing with them will contribute positively to the whole family's adjustment process after the death (Fenwick et al., 2007; Heiney et al., 2001; Okun & Nowinski, 2011).

Moreover, having time to say goodbye before dying allows a person to take care of unfinished business, such as settling financial affairs (Fenwick et al., 2007; Heiney et al., 2001; Okun & Nowinski, 2011). Once these practical aspects that help the family prepare for the eventual death are in place, quality time can be spent with important family members and friends (Fenwick et al., 2007; Heiney et al., 2001; Okun & Nowinski, 2011).

### **5.5.3 Tangible reminders of the deceased**

Although in the minority, a few participants indicated that they attached great value to tangible reminders of the deceased. Lisa said that her father wrote her and her sisters letters for future special occasions, such as birthdays. In that way she was reminded of him even after he had passed away, and she experienced a sense of connection with him, as if he was still there, watching over them.

*He wrote us letters for like big events, like our birthdays or 21<sup>st</sup> ... But it's like, it's a happy thought – because other people, other people never get that. So in a way he's still there with big days like my birthday.*

People tend to assign emotions to physical objects belonging to the people they love. Apart from the adolescent's narrative ways of communicating with the deceased, a number of adolescents have reported the benefits of physical prompts (Balk & Corr, 2009). Physical

prompts can facilitate adolescents in maintaining an on-going positive bond with the deceased parent. For example, adolescents may use memory boxes to strengthen their identity with and relation to the deceased parent (Balk & Corr, 2009). In many instances, a memory box may help an adolescent to consciously focus on the positive memories they have of the deceased (Balk & Corr, 2009; McKissock & McKissock, 2006; Wunnenberg, 2000).

#### 5.5.4 Journal writing

Although only one participant made mention of journal writing, I found it significant and necessary to include because of the qualitative nature of this study. This participant described her diary as a means of discarding suppressed emotions such as anger, sadness and frustration. She indicated that, even though she spoke to someone about her emotions at times, in many ways she kept her emotions suppressed. However, when she wrote down suppressed feelings she felt as if she could let all her emotions out.

*Ek gaan skryf in my diary hoe sleg ek voel. My diary is die een wat my deur dit gebring het, want ek kon escape daar en ek kon al my gevoelens neerskryf ... Soos, om alles neer te skryf help my baie. Dit voel vir my partykeer asof ... as ek met iemand praat, dan kom nie presies alles uit wat ek wil sê nie. In my diary ... kom alles uit en jy huil so erg, maar sodra jy klaar gehuil is, is dit soos, okay, ek kan nou weer vir 'n tydjie aangaan. (Annie)*

According to McKissock and McKissock (2006), many people describe keeping a journal to write down emotions as helpful during bereavement. This does not necessarily mean that writing down one's deepest and most painful emotions is an easy task. However, once a person starts the writing process, he or she experiences a sense of relief and inner peace from utilising words effectively (McKissock & McKissock, 2006; Wunnenberg, 2000).

Wunnenberg (2000) indicates that a journal can also serve as a means of communicating thoughts the bereaved wishes they had shared with the deceased. When a person writes down these feelings of anger, guilt, sadness or regret, these emotions tend to have a less significant influence on his or her daily life. Moreover, since adolescence is a stage during which young people experience various feelings and undergo bodily changes, they are often irritated with, or angry at, a parent. By writing down thoughts, an adolescent can liberate these inner feelings (Andersson & Conley, 2012; Wunnenberg, 2000).

A study by Alparone, Pagliaro and Rizzo (2015) indicates that writing about a past traumatic experience has repeatedly been associated with improvements in health and psychological well-being. His study examined 70 undergraduates who wrote about a past painful event or a neutral topic. The results indicated that expressive writing has a positive effect on anxiety after a four-month follow-up period. It therefore is possible that writing in various forms can positively influence a person during stressful and traumatic life events (Alparone et al., 2015).

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Based on data from this study and previous research, it appears that parentally bereaved adolescents make use of various coping measures to help them adjust and continue with life. Supportive family, friends and community members, combined with spiritual beliefs and a strong sense of coherence, help bereaved adolescents cope both on the inter- and intra-personal levels. More specifically, it appears that personal strengths and beliefs, as well as support from others, play a role in promoting the adjustment process after the death of a parent. Nevertheless, although these four core themes stood out as primary factors promoting adjustment, other secondary factors mentioned by one or two participants also appear to play a significant role in adjustment after parental loss. Amongst these non-specific coping

mechanisms, a mixture of physical exercise, having time to prepare for the death of a parent afflicted by cancer, tangible reminders and journal writing were central to the adjustment process. These support systems and coping factors appear to better the adolescents' quality of life and ability to understand and comprehend the loss, and to adjust to changes.

The loss of a parent is most certainly not easy. However, implementing these coping mechanisms helps make the process more bearable. The following chapter presents a conclusion to the study, as well as recommendations for future, similar studies.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of what helped a sample of young adults who had lost a parent during adolescence to adjust and continue with life. More specifically, the study aimed to gain an understanding of what helped adolescents to adjust within the framework of positive psychology. In this chapter I provide an overview of the study, referring to the *theoretical framework*, *literature review*, *method* and *findings*. The focus will be on the key findings.

#### 6.1 The relevance of the theoretical framework for this study

For the theoretical purposes of this study I chose Antonovsky's (1987) sense of coherence theory and Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory within the larger paradigm of positive psychology. Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory highlights the significance of important attachment figures throughout life. A parent is a primary attachment figure, thus when a parent dies an adolescent loses a major attachment figure. This study, however, did not focus on the loss of this primary attachment figure (the parent), but on the importance of continuing attachment bonds with other significant attachment figures, as well as with the deceased parent.

The relevance and importance of Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory was highlighted by the various participants in this study, who reported the importance of a compassionate remaining parent. Other attachment bonds with friends, extended family and community members were also highlighted by the participants. Nevertheless, above and beyond these important attachment figures, continuing a bond with the deceased parent was also regarded as

significant during the adjustment process after the parent died. The participants indicated the value of a deeper, spiritual attachment continued with the deceased parent.

In this sense, Bowlby's theory (1980) helped me to understand and further interpret the importance of attachment bonds with both living figures as well as the deceased parent. Based on Bowlby's attachment theory (1980) and the participants' feedback, I therefore regard secure attachment bonds as a significant part of adjustment after the death of a parent.

Furthermore, I regarded Antonovsky's (1987) sense of coherence theory as relevant to this study, since the majority of participants I interviewed indicated a strong sense of coherence as personality trait. Participants who indicated a strong sense of coherence revealed this trait both through their verbal and non-verbal behaviour. More specifically, the majority of participants signified this trait when they spoke about the general adjustment after losing a parent and their general positive outlook on life. It appears as though the participants, all of whom had experienced the death of a parent, became even stronger individuals after the loss. More specifically, a strong sense of coherence was indicated by participants who were able to cope in a constructive rather than destructive way despite these adverse circumstances. For me, this is an indication that a strong sense of coherence helps an adolescent to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent.

In my viewpoint, therefore, having secure attachment bonds with supportive figures, and having a strong sense of coherence during difficult times, are important parts of adjustment. More specifically, within the framework of positive psychology, these two aspects point to two critical components central to adjustment, namely having solid inter-personal support (attachment bonds) and having solid intra-personal traits (strong sense of coherence). In my

opinion, these two components will aid an individual to adjust and continue with life in a constructive way after the death of a parent.

## 6.2 Literature review

Given the positive approach of my study, the focus was on factors that helped adolescents to adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent. The emphasis of mainstream psychology, however, is on pathology, disorders and obstacles. Because of this I found limited literature focusing solely on adjustment without highlighting the pathology accompanying loss. Within this frame of mainstream psychology, reference was often made to coping and adjustment, despite the focus of the study being on the loss experience. Despite of different paradigms, I found useful literature for this study.

More specifically, literature within the mainstream psychology paradigm helped me to understand and further grasp the impact of such a traumatic event on an adolescent's life. The literature particularly highlighted the impact of the death of a parent on a developing child and/or adolescent. The literature also helped me to understand the construct of positive psychology in comparison to that of mainstream psychology. Thus, having access to different paradigms helped me choose the most appropriate methodology for this study. The literature enabled me to improve the qualitative nature of my study by choosing appropriate theories for analysing the data.

Whilst studying the literature on adolescents and parental death, however, it appeared to me that there is limited research focusing on adolescent *adjustment*. The majority of studies focus on adolescents' experiences of loss and the pathology accompanying the loss. Therefore, within the larger paradigm of positive psychology, my literature review can contribute



particularly to research on adjustment, coping and continuing with life in a healthy way after the death of a parent.

### **6.3 Method**

In my opinion, the qualitative nature of this study contributed to the significance of its findings. I was able to conduct interviews with individuals in person. The participants would not have been able to share the same amount of emotion and feelings by simply completing a quantitative questionnaire distributed via the internet. The interviews allowed me to observe verbal and non-verbal behaviour, which contributed to the richness of the data. Moreover, I experienced that the participants felt comfortable during the interviews, as they were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of the conversation. Additionally, as part of introducing my research topic during the interviews, I informed the participants of my mother's passing. In my opinion, sharing the loss of my mother made the participants feel even more comfortable, as they often mentioned that I would be able to identify with and relate to some of their experiences.

In terms of analysing and presenting the data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps of thematic analysis assisted me in analysing my data and presenting it thoroughly in this final research report. Furthermore, being able to record the interviews was a significantly useful technique, particularly for the purpose of transcribing and formulating themes.

### **6.4 Results**

The themes that arose in this study pointed to: (1) findings that have been reported in previous literature; (2) findings that have not yet been reported; and (3) findings that offer limited information on the topic. For instance, the themes *Family* and *Social support* can be

found in various studies. However, there are limited studies discussing these topics in depth with regard to parentally bereaved adolescents.

More specifically, my study pointed out various aspects of *Family support*. In relation to family support, my study highlighted the role of the remaining parent, the role of the parent's partner and the role of the extended family. In my opinion there still are limited international and particularly South African studies highlighting the roles of these supporting structures in parentally bereaved adolescents' adjustment.

In terms of social support, various studies have focused on the role of friends supporting bereaved children, particularly during adolescence. My study, however, divided the role of supportive friends into two categories: *emotional support* and *distractive support*. More specifically, since adolescent phases are a dominant part of adolescent development, different types of support are applicable to different adolescence phases. Emotional support, for instance, appeared to be more relevant to adolescents in a later phase, compared to distractive support, which was more helpful to adolescents in earlier phases.

Another dominant theme highlighted in this study is *Religion*. Literature on religion has pointed out the role of religious beliefs during times of suffering. My study, however, highlights two different aspects of religion as applicable during loss. The one aspect points to *religion as coping mechanism*. The other aspect refers to *spiritual communication*. Communication between the living and the deceased has not yet been highlighted as a coping mechanism in many studies. In the case of an adolescent losing a parent, a primary attachment figure is instantly absent. My study highlights that continuing communication through prayer was often a useful coping mechanism after the loss of a parent.

Apart from strong religious beliefs, having strong willpower to cope and continue with life despite adverse circumstances manifested in this study. More specifically, a *strong sense of coherence* was a personality trait I recognised in the majority of the participants during the interviews. Very few studies are focused on adolescent adjustment and its relationship with intra-personal strengths. I therefore believe that this study sheds light on a topic that can be explored in more depth in the future.

The last four sub-themes, namely *exercise*, *having time to prepare for the death of a parent diagnosed with cancer*, *tangible reminders* and *journal writing*, are based on feedback from the minority of participants. However, I felt the need to include these themes since I believe these coping mechanisms contributed to this study's findings and may as well be addressed in future studies that focus on coping with death.

*Exercise* was pointed out as a form of stress relief, yet limited studies discuss exercising as a form of adjustment after the death of a loved one. Moreover, the value and sentiment associated with *tangible reminders* of the deceased have not yet been studied in depth in terms of coping. I believe this study can contribute to future studies when researching these themes in more depth.

## **6.5 Limitations**

The participants in this study were similar with regard to important aspects such as income, race and ethnicity. Therefore, this sample only represents a certain portion of the South African population in a country in which there is a variety of income groups, races and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, having a homogeneous sample is also beneficial to my study. Since the majority of participants in this study had similar backgrounds and contexts, the in-depth results represent the experiences of a specific portion of the South African population.

A further limitation of this study was the unequal proportion of males and females. Most of the participants in this study were female. Therefore, most of the themes that were identified might be associated with gender-related aspects. It is possible that in a sample in which the male-female ratio is more equal, other aspects might emerge from the data.

## **6.6 Recommendations**

During the interviews it became clear that aspects such as the nature of the relationship with the deceased parent, the age of the participant and the gender of the deceased parent and participant may have played a role in the resources that had been used by the participant in order to adjust. Consequently, future studies can take these aspects into consideration in the design of studies about adolescent adjustment after the death of a parent.

It appears that a combination of the above themes aided in adolescents' adjustment after the death of a parent. Yet these are only a few factors that were pointed out. I therefore would recommend that a future quantitative study on adolescent adjustment be performed to explore other factors that support the process of adjustment after parental death. A quantitative study will enable a larger sample of participants to be studied and empirical conclusions could be drawn based on the findings of such a study. By exploring a large sample, the resources of people from different races, genders and belief systems could be explored.

Furthermore, I believe that the findings of this study can be used to plan interventions and support groups for adolescents whose parent has passed away. Support groups can be set up in which adolescents share their individual experiences of what helped them to adjust after the death of a parent. In this way, ideas can be shared, people can identify with each other and can help each other adjust after the death of a parent.

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## **ADDENDUMS**

### **ADDENDUM A**



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#### **STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

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**Title of study:** Exploring factors that helped adolescents adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dane Ludik, from the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University. The data collected for this research project will be used for my Masters Research in Psychology. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you had lost a parent to death during adolescence and you could contribute towards the aims of the study which seeks to explore factors that helped adolescents adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Exploring factors that helped adolescents adjust and continue with life after the death of a parent.

#### **2. PROCEDURES**

If you are willing to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: To ease the process of the interview, you will complete a short questionnaire requiring biographical information. Thereafter I will conduct a semi-structured interview that will last approximately 90 minutes to answer two broad questions. Before we start the interview I would like to ask your permission to record the interview for the ease of accuracy. Once the interview is completed, I will transcribe the whole session and condense the core themes of the interview. I will then arrange a follow up interview at your convenience so that I can present the core themes to you just to verify the accuracy.

#### **3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Often when we talk about our experiences, we might feel some discomfort during the process. Should you experience such emotions and if you want to withdraw from the study, you are at liberty to stop the interview process at any time. Should you experience any discomfort, you can contact Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic, the Psychology Department's free counselling center. Address: Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic, Welgevallen House, Suidwal Street, Stellenbosch.

Phone: 021 808 2696, E-mail: WCPC@sun.ac.za

#### **4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Participating in research projects like these can be rewarding for you because reflecting on important aspects of your life, such as your achievements or overcoming difficulties, and how you experience and negotiate the factors that helped you to adjust and continue with life after the death of your parent, can provide us with valuable information that can be used to plan interventions for other adolescents who have lost a parent to death.

#### **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary and no payment will be offered for your time.

#### **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding procedures where your identity and personal information will not be available to the public. With your permission, interviews will be recorded, and you will have the right as to review/edit the recordings. The recorded interviews and biographical questionnaires will be safely locked within the psychology department and no one besides the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. After the study has been completed, the recordings will be erased. Should the interview data be converted to a research article, your personal details will not be included in the article. The common themes gleaned from the data will be reported and care will be taken to ensure that none of your details or your location will be identifiable.

#### **7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be part of this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

#### **8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHERS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Dane Ludik (Researcher) cell phone: 072 222 8408 Email: [16542126@sun.ac.za](mailto:16542126@sun.ac.za)

Prof. Awie Greeff (Supervisor) phone: 021 808 3464 (w); 021 887 8294 (h)

Email: [apg@sun.ac.za](mailto:apg@sun.ac.za)

#### **9. RIGHTS OF PARTICIPANT**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development at Stellenbosch University.

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

The information above was described and explained to me, by Dane Ludik in..... and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to ..... She was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in.....and no translator was used.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**



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## **UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH**

### **INWILLIGING OM DEEL TE NEEM AAN NAVORSING**

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Titel van studie: Verkenning van faktore wat adolessente gehelp het om aan te pas en aan te beweeg met sy/haar lewe na die dood van 'n ouer.

Jy word gevra om deel te neem aan 'n navorsingstudie wat gedoen word deur Dane Ludik, van die Departement Sielkunde aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch. Die data wat ingesamel gaan word vir hierdie navorsingsprojek sal gebruik word vir my Meestersgraad in Sielkunde. Jy is as moontlike deelnemer aan die studie gekies omdat jy gedurende adolessensie 'n ouer afgestaan het aan die dood en jy moontlik 'n bydrae tot die doel van hierdie studie kan lewer, naamlik om faktore te identifiseer wat adolessente gehelp het met hulle aanpassing en aanbeweeg met hulle lewe nadat hulle 'n ouer verloor het.

#### **1. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE**

Die verkenning van faktore wat adolessente gehelp het om aan te pas en aan te beweeg met sy/haar lewe na die dood van sy of haar ouer.

#### **2. PROSEDURES**

Indien jy inwillig om aan die studie deel te neem, vra ek dat jy die volgende doen: Om die onderhoud prosedure aan die gang te sit moet jy 'n kort vraelys voltooi wat jou biografiese inligting vereis. Daarna gaan ek 'n semi-gestruktureerde onderhoud met jou voer van ongeveer 90 minute waartydens jy twee oop-einde vrae gaan antwoord. Voordat ons met die onderhoud begin sal ek graag jou toestemming wil kry om die onderhoud op te neem, om die akkuraatheid van dit wat jy sê te verseker. Wanneer die onderhoud voltooi is, sal ek die hele onderhoud uit tik en die kerntemas saamvat. Daarna sal ek 'n opvolg onderhoud reël op 'n tyd wat jou pas sodat ek die kerntemas wat na vore gekom aan jou kan oordra sodat jy die akkuraatheid daarvan kan bevestig.

#### **3. MOONTLIKE RISIKO'S EN ONGEMAKLIKHEID**

Wanneer ons oor ons ervarings praat, voel ons dikwels ongemaklik. Indien jy sulke emosies sou ervaar en van die studie wil onttrek, is jy daarop geregtig om enige tyd tydens die onderhoud die proses te stop. Indien jy enige ongemak sou ervaar kan jy gerus die Welgevallen Gemeenskapsielkunde Kliniek kontak. Dit is die Departement Sielkunde se gratis voorligtingsentrum. Die adres is: Welgevallen Gemeenskapsielkunde Kliniek, Welgevallen Huis, Suidwal Straat, Stellenbosch.

Telefoon: 021 808 2696

E-pos: [WCPC@sun.ac.za](mailto:WCPC@sun.ac.za)

#### **4. MOONTLIKE VOORDELE VIR DEELNEMERS EN/OF VIR DIE SAMELEWING**

Deelname aan studies soortgelyk aan hierdie een kan dikwels voordelig wees, juis omdat jy die geleentheid kry om te reflekteer oor belangrike aspekte van jou lewe, bv. jou prestasies of teleurstellings, of hoe jy gebeurtenisse ervaar het en hoe sekere faktore jou gehelp het om aan te pas en aan te beweeg met jou lewe nadat jy 'n ouer afgestaan het aan die dood.

#### **5. VERGOEDING VIR DEELNAME**

Deelname in hierdie studie is vrywillig en jy sal geen betaling ontvang vir jou tyd nie.

#### **6. VERTROULIKHEID**

Enige inligting wat deur middel van die navorsing verkry word en wat met jou in verband gebring kan word, sal vertroulik bly en slegs met jou toestemming bekend gemaak word, of soos deur die wet vereis. Vertroulikheid sal gehandhaaf word deur middel van kodering-prosedures waar jou identiteit en persoonlike inligting nie beskikbaar sal wees vir die publiek nie. Met jou toestemming sal die onderhoud opgeneem word en jy sal die geleentheid kry om die opname te hersien, of te wysig. Die onderhoud-opnames en biografiese vraelyste sal veilig toegesluit word in 'n kas in die Departement Sielkunde en geen persoon behalwe ek en my studieleier sal toegang tot die data hê nie. Nadat die studie voltooi is, sal al die opnames uitgewis word. Indien die onderhoud-data gebruik gaan word in 'n navorsingsartikel sal jou persoonlike inligting nie in die artikel ingesluit word nie. Die geïdentifiseerde temas sal gerapporteer word en daar sal seker gemaak word dat jou persoonlike besonderhede nie identifiseerbaar is nie.

#### **7. DEELNAME EN ONTTREKKING**

Jy kan self besluit of jy aan die studie wil deelneem of nie. Indien jy inwillig om aan die studie deel te neem, kan jy te eniger tyd daaraan onttrek sonder enige nadelige gevolge. Jy kan ook weier om op bepaalde vrae te antwoord, maar steeds aan die studie deelneem. Die navorser kan jou aan die studie onttrek indien omstandighede dit noodsaaklik maak.

#### **8. IDENTIFIKASIE VAN NAVORSER**

Indien jy enige vrae of besorgdheid omtrent die navorsing het, staan dit jou vry om in verbinding te tree met:

Dane Ludik (Navorser) sel: 072 222 8408

E-pos: [16542126@sun.ac.za](mailto:16542126@sun.ac.za)

Prof. Awie Greeff (Studieleier) tel: 021 808 3464(w); 021 887 8294(h)E-pos: [apg@sun.ac.za](mailto:apg@sun.ac.za)

#### **9. REGTE VAN DEELNEMERS**

Jy kan te eniger tyd jou inwilliging terugtrek en jou deelname beëindig, sonder enige nadelige gevolge vir jou. Deur deel te neem aan die navorsing doen jy geensins afstand van enige wetlike regte, eise of regsmiddel nie. Indien jy vrae het oor jou regte as deelnemer aan navorsing, skakel met Me Maléne Fouché [[mfouché@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouché@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4622] van die Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling by die Universiteit Stellenbosch.

**VERKLARING DEUR DEELNEMER**

Die bostaande inligting is aan my, ....., gegee en verduidelik deur Dane Ludik in Afrikaans en ek is dié taal magtig. Ek is die geleentheid gebied om vrae te stel en my vrae is tot my bevrediging beantwoord.

Ek wil hiermee vrywillig in om deel te neem aan hierdie studie. 'n Afskrif van hierdie vorm is aan my gegee.

---

**Naam van deelnemer**

---

**Handtekening van deelnemer**

---

**Datum****VERKLARING DEUR NAVORSER**

Ek verklaar dat ek die inligting in hierdie dokument vervat verduidelik het aan ..... Hy/sy is aangemoedig en oorgenoeg tyd gegee om vrae aan my te stel. Dié gesprek is in Afrikaans gevoer en geen vertaler is gebruik nie.

---

**Handtekening van navorser**

---

**Datum**

## **ADDENDUM B**

### **Semi-structured interview schedule**

1. How did you experience life after the death of your parent?
2. In your experience, what helped you to adapt and continue with life after the death of your parent?

Probing questions:

- Can you please elaborate on that?
- Can you please tell me more about?
- What was your experience of that?
- How did that make you feel?

### **Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoudskedule**

1. Hoe het jy die lewe ervaar na die dood van jou ouer?
2. In jou ervaring, wat het jou gehelp om aan te pas en aan te beweeg met jou lewe na die dood van jou ouer?

Aanmoedigingsvrae:

- Kan jy asseblief daarop uitbrei?
- Kan jy my asseblief meer vertel daarvan?
- Wat was jou ervaring daarvan?
- Hoe het dit jou laat voel?

## **ADDENDUM C**

### **Biographical questionnaire**

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How old were you when your parent passed away? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many years has it been since your parent passed on? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Did your mother or father pass away? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you have any siblings? If yes, please specify his/her gender and age  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Biografiese vraelys**

1. Hoe oud is jy? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Wat is jou geslag? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Hoe oud was jy toe jou ouer afgesterf het? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Hoeveel jaar terug is jou ouer oorlede? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Was dit jou ma of pa wat afgesterf het? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Het jy enige broers of susters? Indien wel, asseblief spesifiseer sy/haar geslag en  
ouderdom \_\_\_\_\_